

Community assessments of the proposed Kingsway Solar project:

A report on the findings from a survey of local residents

Embargoed for Release 24 October 2025



Kingsway Solar Community Action



Introduction

As temperatures warm and energy prices rise, it is clear that public support for renewables as part of the green transition has grown substantially, and that alternative energy sources are increasingly popular. At the same time it is also evident that some green energy initiatives are more popular than others, and that some of the current Net Zero policies being pursued by the UK government have become more, rather than less, controversial. One of the most important examples of this contrast between increasing support for renewable energy investment and rising opposition to government Net Zero policies in the UK is the current public and political outcry over large scale solar energy plants – especially in rural areas, and in regions where the cumulative effect of numerous large solar projects increases concerns about their short and long-term impact.

Although we know from many previous studies of public perceptions of new technology – especially in sensitive areas such as food production or health – that high levels of engagement and dialogue are crucial to ensuring widespread public acceptance and support of them, the impact of large solar farms on rural areas has been comparatively little studied in the UK. Some research, such as the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DENSNZ) public attitudes tracker, suggests there is consistent and rising public support for solar panel facilities, citing survey findings that a majority of the British public ‘would be happy for a solar panel farm to be constructed in their local area’. Only less than 3% of the public, they claim, would be ‘very unhappy’ with such a prospect. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-attitudes-tracking-survey>).

Our local study, the first of its kind to combine standard tick-box (Likert) scales with detailed qualitative data, paints a very different picture and indeed reveals almost entirely opposite results. Only two out of 211 respondents we surveyed – less than one percent – expressed unconditional support for a solar industrial facility to be built in their local area. Likewise, in contrast to the government’s data, research for this study found that a substantial majority of over 90% are not at all ‘happy for a solar panel farm to be constructed in their local area’.

More research is urgently needed to clarify the reasons people support and oppose large solar farms. The issue has become increasingly divisive and fractious. This crucial source of green energy will not meet its potential if the public increasingly oppose its use. Moreover, the entire renewables sector, as well as the Net Zero goals that depend on it, will be compromised if public trust and support are lost.

This study was undertaken to support a more well-informed view of the role of local communities in the green transition and we welcome the your comments, feedback and input in pursuit of this objective.

Kathy Day and Sarah Franklin on behalf of Kingsway Solar Community Action

Executive summary

This report presents findings from a community survey of 211 residents conducted between 8 June and 1 September 2025 concerning the Kingsway Solar project proposed for the Balsham, West Wrating and Weston Colville area of South Cambridgeshire.¹ The study was undertaken to provide a fuller, better-informed account of local views and feelings about the proposed Kingsway project, and to contribute to national discussion of the role of large-scale solar in the green energy transition, as well as to the second stage of the Kingsway Solar statutory consultation.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the survey covered five broad areas including community views of the Kingsway proposal; the green transition more generally; attitudes toward local landscape and agricultural heritage, nature and wellbeing; and hopes and concerns for the future. The survey generated an unusually large volume of material, including ~1,055 short-answer entries (~28,800 words) to open-ended questions. The findings therefore offer a “wide and deep” account of community perspectives, including assessments of potential impacts on the national economy and food security and the challenges of balancing land-use priorities for energy, agriculture, residential communities and environmental conservation. They also describe in detail respondents’ main concerns about the effects of the proposed facility on their own lives and those of their friends, families and communities. Typical answers span a broad range of interconnected topics—even within single responses—and frequently link protection of open countryside and rural lifeways with issues of community safety, safeguarding and wellbeing, including mental and physical health.

Overall, the dataset reveals very high levels of opposition to the proposed Kingsway project, with over 90.0% of respondents opposed and 86.3% strongly opposed. Opposition is based on multiple, overlapping concerns, with the five primary concerns summarised in Table 1.

Concern	Number	Percentage
Visual impact on the landscape	194	91.9%
Impact on wildlife or nature	190	90.0%
Loss of productive farmland	190	90.0%
Construction traffic or noise	182	86.3%
Poor communication or lack of transparency about the project	161	76.3%

Table 1: Main categories of concern about the proposed Kingsway Solar project (n = 211). Percentages represent the share of respondents selecting each concern in Section 5 Part 1 of the survey.

The five main concerns are interwoven with other prominent themes, including the exceptionally large scale of the project (218 mentions), its perceived encirclement of residential villages (48 mentions), the lack of consideration of more appropriate alternative

¹ For more detailed information about the proposed Kingsway Solar project see Appendix 1.

site locations such as brownfield or rooftop options (92 mentions), and uncertainty about the long-term stewardship of the land (27 mentions).

Although respondents expressed strong support for the green transition, and a desire to contribute to it, the survey results suggest that they favour more sustainable alternatives such as rooftop solar, smaller and more dispersed solar energy facilities, the use of brownfield sites for industrial energy facilities and more joined-up community energy projects. These are viewed as measures that protect both the environment and agriculture without sacrificing rural communities, lifestyles or landscape character.

Although the survey did not include specific questions about the public consultation process, a strong and consistent theme throughout the dataset is widespread dissatisfaction with how the Kingsway Solar project has been presented to local communities, with more than three-quarters of respondents (76%) indicating dissatisfaction with the consultation process.

The most frequently expressed concerns centre on the lack of meaningful community participation or engagement, a perceived disregard for rural life and open countryside, and a general absence of transparency in the development process. These concerns are reinforced by criticism of the poor quality of information provided to residents, the sometimes-unfriendly behaviour of the developer's representatives, and an apparent lack of due diligence regarding key issues such as site selection, survey accuracy, safety risks and environmental impacts.

Together, these factors have fuelled growing cynicism about the role of venture capital and private profit, along with unease at the willingness of large local landowners to lease their land for industrial energy use. Many respondents also expressed frustration that the government's accelerated approach to achieving Net Zero appears to have sidelined more careful consultation on how to balance land, energy and community priorities. Across the dataset, there is a consistent undercurrent of scepticism toward the claimed benefits of the Kingsway Solar project. Respondents repeatedly questioned the transparency, professionalism and integrity of the project's promoters, describing the process as rushed, poorly communicated and insufficiently scrutinised, all of which have contributed to increasingly high levels of mistrust and opposition.

Overall, the survey findings show that while residents strongly support renewable energy and the aims of the green transition, they regard the Kingsway Solar project as the wrong way to achieve these goals.

Box 1: What this community survey tells us

- There is overwhelming community opposition to the Kingsway Solar Project, both in scale and design.
- Residents are not opposed to renewable energy, but they want it delivered in a way that is local, fair, and environmentally responsible.
- The project has created deep mistrust due to poor consultation, communication failures, and perceptions of "greenwashing."
- People value the countryside for wellbeing, farming, and wildlife, and see its loss as too high a price for this development.
- There is strong demand for alternative solutions, such as rooftop solar, smaller-scale projects, and community-owned schemes.

Methodology

The survey was conducted using a standard questionnaire format that combined nine multiple-choice (tick-box) questions with six open-ended (text) sections. These explored residents' levels of support or opposition to the Kingsway proposal and included sections on views of the green transition, connections to landscape and nature, impacts on wellbeing and lifestyle, and current and future hopes and concerns for the area. Significant additional information on topics not covered by the closed questions was derived from the open sections, which invited respondents to elaborate on or expand their views in short written answers. An unusually high proportion of participants (81%) provided written comments across the five open sections, generating nearly 1,000 responses (972 in total), many of which introduced new themes not included in the structured questions.

The survey was available both online and in paper format, and all responses were collected anonymously. Quantitative findings are presented as percentages and numerical counts (each percentage uses the relevant item base), while open-text responses were thematically analysed using AI-assisted methods, with indicative extracts selected to illustrate typical views. The overall dataset and findings are intended to inform the community's response to the Stage Two statutory consultation and to contribute to broader debate about the role of industrial-scale solar farms in open countryside near rural villages.

Limitations

As participation was voluntary, the survey results may be subject to self-selection bias, with those holding stronger views potentially more likely to respond. The survey respondent pool was specific to villages proximate to the proposed site, so findings may not represent wider regional opinions. Reported percentages refer to number of respondents in this survey, not the overall population, and should be viewed as indicative of the views of local community residents rather than as statistically representative at a national level.

Section One: Community views of the Kingsway proposal

Section One explores respondents' overall views and feelings towards the proposed Kingsway Solar project and is divided into two parts. Part 1 presents a five-point Likert scale allowing respondents to indicate their level of support or opposition to the scheme; Part 2 provides an open-ended space for respondents to explain their answers to Part 1.

All 211 respondents completed Part 1, and all but two provided answers to Part 2. The length of written responses varied considerably, from brief phrases of a few words to detailed comments (maximum single answer ~368 words; see Supplementary Materials; Section One). In total, these answers generated ~13,280 words of qualitative data, making it the largest single dataset within the survey.

The findings from both parts of this section demonstrate clear and deeply held opposition to the Kingsway Solar project. Nearly all respondents (92.9%) expressed some degree of opposition, while fewer than one in ten expressed any level of support or neutrality towards

the proposed scheme. Among those opposed, the vast majority (86.3%) stated that they were 'strongly opposed' (Figure 1).

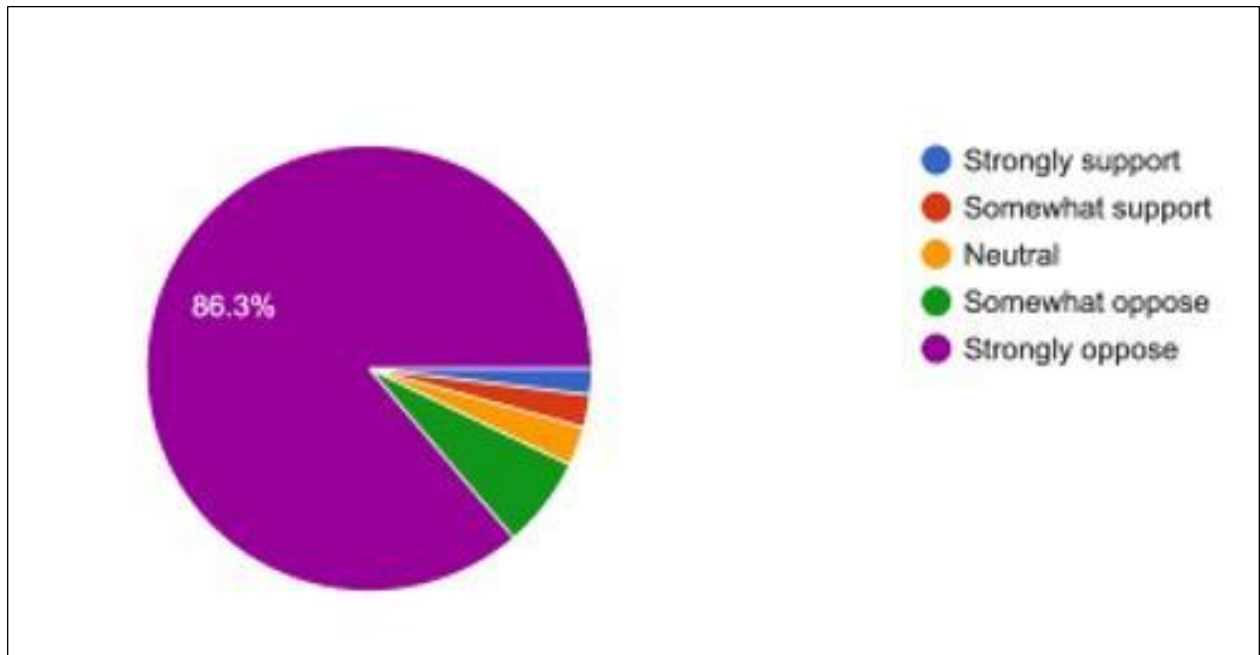


Figure 1: How do you feel about the proposed Kingsway Solar farm? (n=211)

Respondents' reasons for opposing the Kingsway proposal are multiple and overlapping. The scale of the proposed project and its perceived industrialisation of the countryside form one of the major themes in the dataset, mentioned 218 times in written responses. Many respondents emphasised the perceived destructive impact of a development of this scale on the open countryside, a landscape regarded as central to the character, identity and wellbeing of rural village life.

While I support the ambition of net zero, this proposal is totally out of scale with the location and would destroy the important amenity value of this bit of countryside. Too big and wrong place!

Shouldn't be happening in the countryside, put them on roofs of factories/car parks / homes. Will be out of date in a matter of months, technology moves quickly and these will scar the countryside for life.

I oppose Kingsway Solar in particular because I think this is the most beautiful area of Cambridgeshire and cannot conceive of why anyone would think it suitable or want to destroy it for an industrial site. It should be preserved and celebrated, not seen as a dispensable resource.

More than 150 similar comments point to what respondents see as the destructive and irreversible consequences of the proposed Kingsway Solar project for local villages and their surrounding landscape.

Way, way too big. It will ruin a beautiful rural village.

This will destroy the countryside and the lives of the people living there.

Massive, unchecked industrialization of residential areas around our villages.

This development will destroy 3500 acres of farmland, recreational amenity and flora and fauna habitat. The location of such facilities should be on brownfield sites, factory and warehouse roofs etc. where the energy is needed, not in rural agricultural areas.

Concerns about land use were widespread throughout the database, with 67 references in this section alone and 660 mentions across the survey as a whole. Among these, 48 respondents expressed particular concern about the loss of agricultural land in an area renowned for its soil fertility, especially at a time of increasing food security risks.

As one respondent summarised:

The land is already under threat from housing, road and rail expansion. Solar panel installations on the scale proposed will take even more land away from agriculture. This in turn will compromise the UK's food security and mean an increase in food miles for imported food supplies. Taking land out of food production for the life span of the solar panel installation will also have detrimental effects on the soil. We will not only lose the farms but also the skills needed to run them and the support industries that supply them.

More than half of the 209 written responses in Section One raised concerns about the loss of agricultural land – a loss many respondents perceived as irreversible.

A totally unjustified and permanent loss of BMV farmland, potentially affecting future food security.

Against using agricultural farming land which will likely be compulsory purchased in future turning it into industrial land permanently.

I strongly oppose the industrialisation of our countryside, the loss of land for wildlife, and very importantly, the loss of valuable, quality arable land.

I do not support building solar farms on productive farmland. As a country, we import approximately 40% of our food. At a time of increased geopolitical insecurity, we should not be reducing our capacity to feed ourselves.

Ruin and industrialisation of agricultural land will not be beneficial to society or the environment.

We are strongly opposed to the Kingsway Solar Panel project as this will destroy highly productive wheat producing fields that will be covered with glass solar panels. It is a criminal act to cover food producing fields with solar panels.

Around one-third of responses (approximately 31%) foregrounded potential harm to wildlife and biodiversity -- again frequently emphasising the irreversibility of such impacts.

I do not support the destruction of the natural environment and effects on wildlife that these installations will inevitably cause.

Many habitats will be ruined forever, and biodiversity will be damaged with no hope of repair.

The mitigating measures suggested by the developers are laughable in terms of wildlife protection.

Despite contrary views, biodiversity will suffer, it is simple ecology

It will have a devastating effect on local wildlife.

It turns our rural community into an industrial site [and] destroys habitat of our already threatened wildlife which is vital to the long term survival of humanity.

The scale is excessive and will massively impact biodiversity in the area.

A similar proportion of respondents (approximately 28%) cited negative impacts on landscape character and visual amenity as significant concerns.

This is in the wrong place, too close to villages and will adversely affect the character of the landscape.

Loss of an ancient and treasured open landscape, where any attempts at screening would be completely inadequate.

While I support the ambition of net zero this proposal is totally out of scale with the location and would destroy the important amenity value of this bit of countryside. Too big and wrong place!

Our small rural village will become a bleak industrialised area. Stop desecrating our countryside. It's nothing short of vandalism.

The visual effect over the environment will be devastating and as West Wrattling is a high location no mitigation will be possible.

It will totally destroy our outlook on lovely fields, footpaths and natural habitats for wildlife of all varieties.

Approximately a quarter of respondents (23%) expressed concern about the encirclement of villages and the proximity of the scheme to homes.

To engulf villages with high 2.5m fences with "Danger of Death" signs protecting the solar factory within a stone's throw of residents' front doors is unacceptable. Encircling several villages will ruin the landscape and make them depressing places to live in. Anywhere that is currently used by local people for walking will be covered in panels.

Several respondents also raised concerns about wellbeing and mental health in Section One (see also Section Four below).

We moved to the countryside to live in the countryside. The proposed development encircles our whole village. We would be living in a solar farm. We have children with autism and mental health needs, and the green space is what gives them a good quality of life. We will have to move if this goes ahead.

I regularly walk the local footpaths for my physical & mental health & I dread the effect that looking out over a sea of huge solar panels, fencing, batteries and keep out signs will have on me and others.

Safety concerns were frequently raised in the open-text responses, with a total of 41 mentions of battery storage risks, 30 references to fire hazards, 9 to flooding, and 14 to potential contamination of chalk aquifers and groundwater. While some respondents raised more than one of these issues, together these comments reflect widespread concern about the safety and environmental risks associated with large-scale solar and battery installations in rural settings.

The batteries that would be used for storage can be dangerous, there have been instances of these catching fire & the only solution to this seems to be dousing them with water until the fire expends itself, flushing chemicals from the batteries into the chalk aquifers which provide our drinking water!

The proposed lithium-ion battery storage system poses a further danger. If such batteries catch fire, they can release toxic chemicals into the air and groundwater, contaminating the chalk aquifers on which our villages depend. Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue have already raised concerns about the hazards of such facilities.

Battery storage farms may be labelled as part of the green transition, but their real-world impact on rural communities tells a very different story.

Practical disruptions that concerned residents included construction traffic (18 mentions) and heavy vehicle movements on unsuitable rural roads (16 mentions), reflecting widespread anxiety about the capacity of local infrastructure to cope with large-scale construction activity.

I'm not entirely opposed to progress in our world but our little village hasn't no way got the road network to cope with the added traffic this development will for sure need for its construction. I'm a HGV driver myself and have been involved in delivering the products required for construction of these solar farms and I've seen

firsthand trucks hitting trees, sinking in verges and numerous damage to hedges and signposts. The construction of this farm, if it goes ahead, will destroy the beauty of our village by the delivering of all the equipment required for this. It won't just be a couple of trucks. It will be hundreds ranging from 45ft low-loaders with plant equipment to 45ft curtain-siders delivering the panels. They will try and get local farms to take delivery of these goods and take them to site on smaller vehicles, but the increase of traffic will destroy the village roads and verges take it from me, the peaceful lifestyle we have will be gone for many years to come.

Finally, a strong and recurring theme is poor communication from the developer and an apparent lack of understanding about the importance of open countryside to rural life.

My mental health has been severely impacted by Kingsway. The initial communications and interactions were handled with a staggering lack of empathy, understanding or tact. The developer's view is clearly the government will sign this off and the community is an inconvenience to be paid superficial and fake regard to as they proceed regardless. They claim to be a Plan B organisation and thus are supposedly committed to working with communities impacted by their work. As we have seen this is lip service only, e.g. submitting the scoping doc for review over Xmas, asking that parish councils are excluded from discussions and bullying of Weston Colville residents for land access.

The Kingsway team has been very poor in terms of communication and community connection. They also seem to have absolutely no idea why access to open countryside is important to people or for that matter what the concept of 'open countryside' actually means.

The communication with the community has been extremely poor.

The poor communication, lack of transparency and arrogant approach of the developers both at the meeting held before Christmas in the Weston Colville reading room and in their subsequent letters and actions is very worrying. I do not trust that the developers are interested in the local community or have any respect for us. On evidence to date, I think they will pursue their own goals, doing the minimum for the community. I also think the whole development and planning process is very worrying. The process here is at odds with the government's claim to want to give more say and return more power to local people, and it is completely undemocratic that one government minister can override local government recommendations and potentially his own planning department.

In summary, an overwhelming >90% of respondents opposed the Kingsway Solar proposal for a variety of reasons. Many cited multiple and overlapping concerns including the loss of valuable farmland and open countryside; safety hazards including fire, flooding and water contamination; proximity to villages; increased traffic and above all the inappropriate scale of the project. On top of these concerns, respondents objected to the poor communication from the developer and inappropriate behaviour towards residents. These concerns were exacerbated by disappointment at the absence of a clear government strategy for land use and renewable energy planning.

Section Two: Community Views of the Green Transition

Like Section One, this section is divided into two parts. The first explores respondents' understandings of the term *green transition*, while the second invites suggestions for how the local community could contribute to sustainability and clean energy initiatives.

In contrast to their overwhelmingly negative views of the proposed Kingsway Solar project, respondents' views of the green transition were generally positive. Most respondents supported the principle of moving towards sustainability, although there was disagreement about which 'green' alternatives were most appropriate, either for the country or the region.

When asked what the term *green transition* meant to them (n=193), participants expressed a range of perspectives. The largest group, around 41%, described it primarily as a shift away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy sources and the achievement of Net Zero targets. A further 22% interpreted the green transition more broadly as a commitment to sustainable living, mentioning recycling, waste reduction, environmental protection and lifestyle change. A smaller proportion, approximately 7%, emphasised the need for a balanced and equitable transition that safeguards farmland, food security, and the character of rural communities alongside renewable energy development.

As one respondent put it:

To me, 'green transition' should mean finding ways to reduce environmental harm without destroying the things we need most — our farmland, water, wildlife, and heritage. Covering prime arable fields with solar panels is the opposite of green.

Others reflected the tension between principle and practice:

I am torn between providing renewable energy and the effect on the local environment.

We need more power, they include batteries, it's better than large housing estates.

A small minority, about 2%, rejected the need for decarbonisation altogether, while around 4% expressed mistrust of the concept, viewing it as greenwashing or a profit-driven exercise.

I worked for an energy company. Please do not dress this up as transitioning to green energy.

Some respondents argued that large solar farms on productive farmland undermine the goals of the green transition, favouring rooftop and brownfield developments instead.

Solar energy has its place, but that place is not on our productive farmland. It should be installed on the roofs of new housing developments, over railway lines, and in car parks — not in the heart of our countryside. This project will be a visual monstrosity, blighting the landscape and destroying the character of our rural community. This

isn't green energy — it's greenwashing at the expense of local people and the environment.

I think solar energy is useful as a 'top-up' means of generating energy, but not as a primary method of generating power; the areas of land required for this are simply too large and its utility is limited during the restricted daylight hours of northern European winters, when it's actually needed most.

Concerns about fairness were also raised by a small group (around 2%), who noted that rural communities bear a disproportionate share of large-scale energy projects while urban areas remain underused.

Rooftops and industrial land would be much better but the government is doing nothing to encourage that.

If all suitable rooftops were used for solar PV the need for huge industrial scale solar parks that destroy good agricultural land and countryside amenities could be eliminated.

This is the wrong solution to meeting our sustainability targets. Why trash a landscape and community in the name of clean energy? Why weaken our ability to produce food and energy by outsourcing this project to unknown investors to build on prime farmland? It just doesn't make sense.

Overall, the findings reveal broad support for sustainability and decarbonisation in principle, coupled with scepticism about how these goals are being implemented. Respondents tend to favour practical, locally appropriate solutions such as rooftop solar, home efficiency measures, and biodiversity protection, rather than industrial-scale solar farms on farmland or open countryside.

Respondents' views on how the local community could contribute to the green transition show that more than half (56.7%) would like to see rooftop and small-scale solar on homes, barns, warehouses, car parks and new-builds instead of farmland or open countryside. A third (33.3%) favour community-owned renewables over privately operated facilities, while 30% emphasise the need for improved home energy efficiency through measures such as insulation and heat pumps. Around a quarter mention transport improvements (25.3%), recycling and waste reduction (20%), or boosting local food and biodiversity (18.7%). Notably, one in five (21.3%) explicitly frame their objection to large solar farms in terms of the failure of such schemes to deliver genuine sustainability by protecting food production, biodiversity and rural landscapes.

In summary, residents' responses to questions about the green transition demonstrate that overall strong support is crosscut by concerns about which measures are being used, and how, and how 'green' initiatives are being implemented – as well as by whom. While most respondents support renewable energy in principle, the majority prefer practical, community-based solutions, while consistently rejecting industrial-scale solar farms as the wrong approach for achieving a truly sustainable future.

Sections Three and Four: Community Connections to Nature and the Land and their Importance to Wellbeing

A significant finding of the survey is that all respondents (100%) feel a connection to the local landscape and its agricultural heritage, with more than four in five (80.5%) describing this connection as *very strong* and the remaining 19% as *moderate*. One respondent (0.5%) described their connections to local landscapes and agriculture as *minimal* and none were *uncertain* (Figure 2).

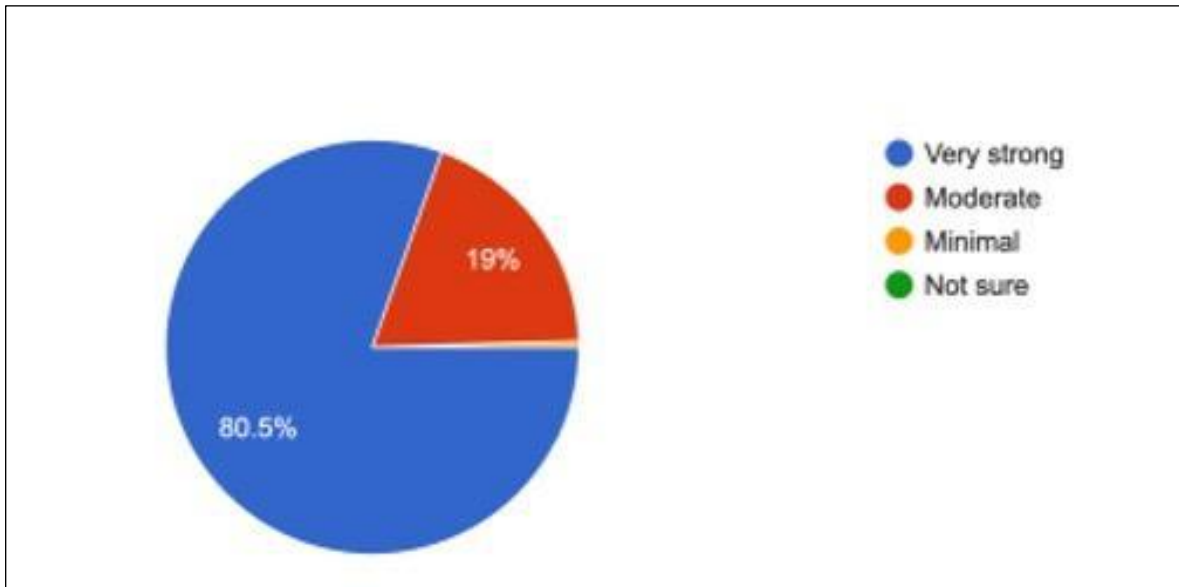


Figure 2: How would you describe your connection to the local landscape and its agricultural heritage (n=210)

Even more striking are the responses to Question 4 on wellbeing where 89.9% stated that the proposed Kingsway Solar project would affect their wellbeing negatively. Positive responses were extremely rare (just 2 of 207 responses, <1%), reinforcing a consistent general pattern of strong emotional attachment to the land paired with strong opposition to the Kingsway proposal.

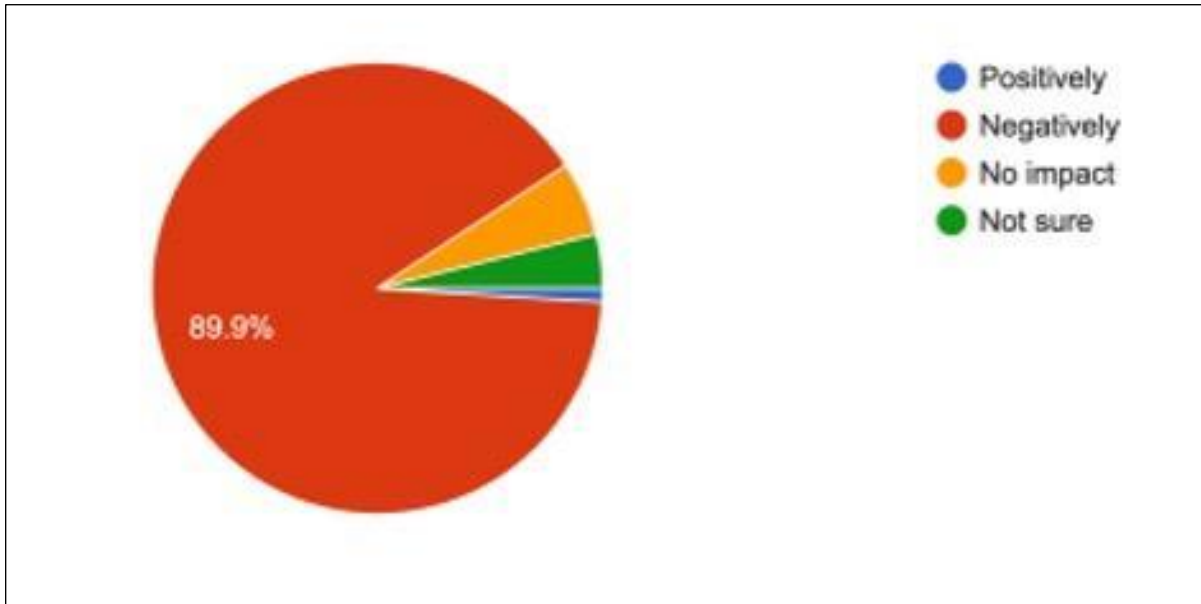


Figure 3: How do you think the solar farm might affect your personal wellbeing (n=207)

In elaborating on their answers, respondents provided more than 2,100 words of comment linking local landscapes, rural activities and nature to both personal and community wellbeing.

Human well-being relies on recognising the deep association that people have with the countryside whether a naturalist, farmer or rambler.... Carpeting the unique rolling hills of South Cambridgeshire with millions of solar panels and associated hardware would result in an ugly soul destroying industrial landscape. Utterly devastating.

Others drew on their personal relationships to nature and the landscape:

I enjoy walking through the fields around Balsham and feel this large venture will spoil that pleasure. I don't mind smaller projects such as one or two fields of panels or maybe an array of wind turbines, but this is just too big.

I have always believed that huge solar works should be carried out above car parks and huge industrial buildings rather than using arable land. Arable land is for farming and crops. It is also for the wellbeing of the creatures that have always lived there.

To explore these connections further, Section Four applies *the Five Steps to Wellbeing* model developed by the New Economics Foundation and adopted by the [NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing) (nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing), a well-established framework for understanding how environments affect mental health and wellbeing.

Using this approach, the survey results show that most respondents value open countryside, nature and rural landscapes as essential to all five of the steps for both personal and community health.

Across these responses, clear patterns emerge. Under **Connecting with others**, 181 of 210 respondents (86.2%) expressed concern that reduced access to rural landscapes would harm both personal wellbeing and the cohesion of the wider community. For **Being Active**, 203 of 210 respondents (96.7%) agreed with the statement “I enjoy walking and spending time in nature,” while 190 of 210 respondents (90.5%) highlighted the importance of open green spaces to physical health. Under **Taking Notice**, nearly all respondents (203 of 209; 97.1%) agreed that they value natural views and peaceful surroundings, and 189 of 209 (90.4%) said that being in nature helps them relax and reflect. In relation to **Keep Learning**, 167 of 199 respondents (83.9%) valued opportunities to learn from nature, while under **Giving**, 140 of 189 respondents (74.1%) wished to be more involved in building a greener, more sustainable future through personal or collective action.

Respondents’ written comments confirm the importance of these connections, in personal and emotional terms that offer more depth of insight into how they feel about the local land:

We bought our house because of the fields around us, loving the views. Since we moved, the countryside has helped my wellbeing and mental health. I love seeing all the wildlife when walking. I am really worried about what is going to be put on the land around our home. I am worried about the wildlife, the health implications for us, and the noise.

I moved here for peace and tranquillity. To be at one with nature around me. And enjoy what this countryside had to offer little did I know it would be a huge solar farm.

We moved to Balsham 3 years ago. We love the outdoors and Balsham and the surrounding area provided all the essentials. As keen cyclists we have enjoyed exploring the quiet lanes and surrounding villages. I love to run, and the surrounding fields, footpaths and woods offer quiet countryside for trails.

The impact it is already having on my physical & mental health is massive. I have rheumatoid arthritis and stress brings on excruciating pain lasting for days, weeks sometimes months. How I manage symptoms is by walking the footpaths around the village and being in nature. Every time there’s something happening with the solar farm I’ve experienced a flare up & ended up in horrible medications & being physically unwell, leading to bouts of depression

In summary, ~90% of respondents in Sections Three and Four link their wellbeing to continued access to the countryside and fear that the proposed Kingsway project would undermine the foundations of community life, including activity, reflection, learning and contribution. The strength of these feelings is reflected in the depth and detail of commentary provided, underscoring the central role of rural landscapes in both individual and community wellbeing.

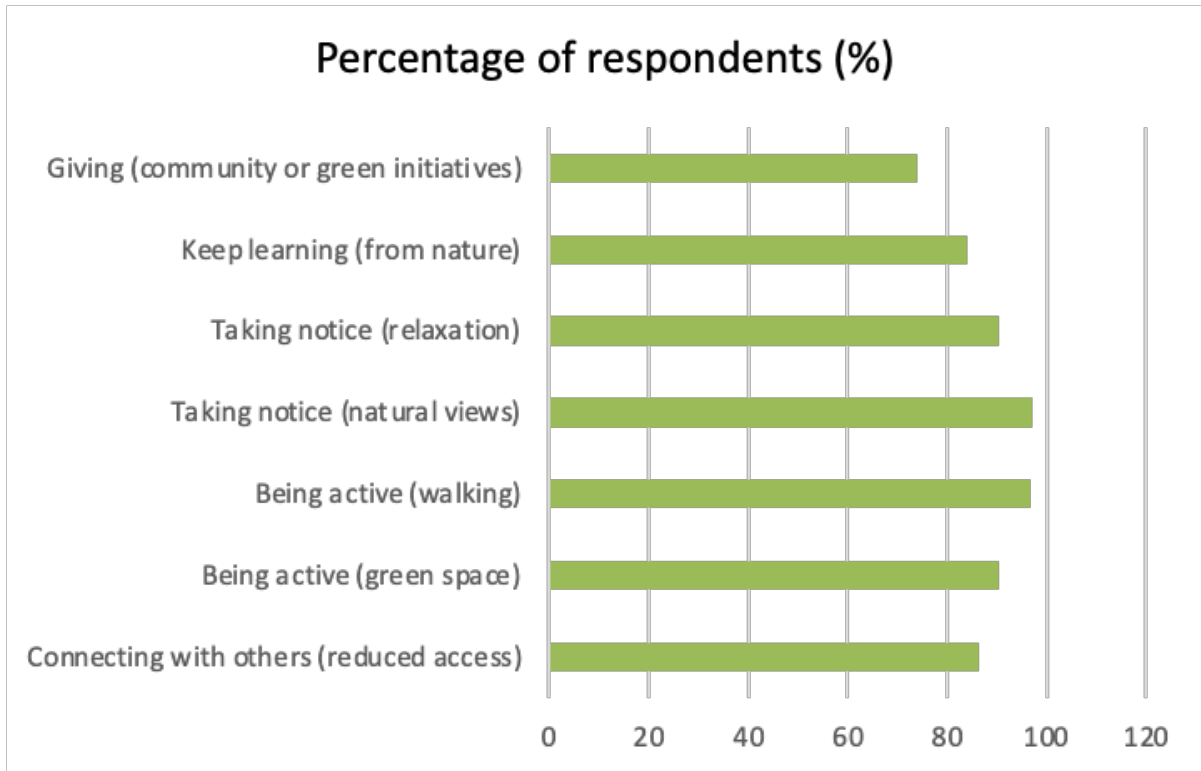


Figure 4: Importance of the countryside according to the Five Steps to Wellbeing (n=209)
 Nearly all respondents link access to the countryside with key aspects of wellbeing, especially *Being Active* (walking, 96.7%) and *Taking Notice* (views 97.1%). Note: per-item n varies; percentages use each item's n.

Section Five: Main hopes and concerns about the Kingsway proposal

Section Five focuses specifically on residents' main concerns about the proposed Kingsway project, offering a chance to summarise their views or add any additional points. It is divided into two parts: a tick box multiple choice question in Part 1 and an open-ended question in Part 2. All 211 respondents completed Part 1, which produced a clear concentration of concerns around four dominant issues: visual impact, wildlife and nature, loss of farmland, and construction disturbance, as shown in Table 1.

The very high percentage of respondents (91.9%) highlighting the negative impact on local landscapes in Part 1 of this section reinforces one of the survey's strongest findings, namely the repeated emphasis on the intensity of residents' connections to the distinctive rural character of the area. This sense of deeply treasured 'rurality' extends to concerns about the loss of productive farmland and wildlife habitats. Fears about construction traffic and noise are also commonly associated with the loss of 'peace' and 'tranquillity'.

The open-ended text responses (87 in total) in Part 2 provide over 3,700 words of short answer 'elaboration' and this section of the survey, offering a chance for final comments, provides many of the most elaborate and powerfully articulated short answers from

respondents. Notably, over half of the respondents explicitly criticised Kingsway's association with venture capital, private profit, and the government's 'fast-track' approach to achieving Net Zero in this section. Around a quarter expressed frustration at poor communication and lack of transparency from the Kingsway team.

The presentations given by Kingsway in West Wrattling have been vague and inconsistent. The initial plans were for two small areas away from the village. Then they extended plans to a much larger areas surrounding West Wrattling and impacting residential areas of West Wrattling.

This is just a money-making scheme that rewards landowners and corporate financiers. They don't care about the community or the countryside.

People move to the country for a way of life. The countryside shouldn't be unnecessarily destroyed. The quality of thousands of people's lives and mental wellbeing will be shattered because of the decisions on incompetent people. In any other profession/ circumstance these proposals would be ridiculed as the most logical location.

I believe that construction and maintenance would be carried out by contractors and private companies that do not care for or about local people or the landscape

The Kingsway team has been very poor in terms of communication and community connection. They also seem to have absolutely no idea why access to open countryside is important to people or for that matter what the concept of 'open countryside' actually means.

I believe that the companies behind these developments are only interested in the profits that can be earned without any concern for the damage to local communities, the environment and our fragile agricultural land.

Due to the wide range of comments, responses were grouped into 14 main themes using AI (see Table 3). The table below summarises their approximate share within the Section Six dataset, with representative quotes and commonly suggested mitigations.

Concern theme	~Share*	Illustrative quotes (from responses)	Typical asks/mitigations
Visual impact / industrialisation	95–98%	“enormous blot on the landscape”; “surrounded by panels”; “rare upland rural landscape industrialised”	Remove Parcel C; reduce scale; set wide buffers; plant screening; keep panels out of key vistas
Wildlife & biodiversity	90–95%	“hares, deer, skylarks... seriously impacted”; “wildlife driven from natural habitat”	Protect/expand wildlife corridors; no herbicides; habitat creation with monitored net-gain (independent audits)
Loss of productive farmland / food security	90–95%	“don’t cover wheat fields with glass”; “we need our own food”	Prioritise rooftops, car parks, brownfield; exclude Best & Most Versatile land; agrivoltaics only if proven
Construction traffic & noise	80–85%	“narrow, poorly maintained roads”; “years of HGVs and concrete”	Defined HGV routes/timing; cap daily movements; use A-road access; road repairs; construction time limits
Poor communication / transparency	70–75%	“vague and inconsistent”; “box-ticking”; “underhand tactics”	Clear, consistent plans; full layout (panels/BESS/roads); publish studies; genuine co-design; independent facilitation
BESS safety & aquifer contamination	20–25%	“fire risk... chemicals into chalk aquifers”; “noise hum”	Independent QRA; locate BESS away from aquifer/homes; secondary containment; real-time monitoring; emergency plans
Heritage & historic landscape	10–15%	“three ancient trackways... moated houses”; “precious historical landscape”	Heritage exclusion zones; visual/setting protections; archaeologist-led surveys; remove/relocate affected parcels
Property value / marketability	10–15%	“lose value”; “harder to sell”	Generous community benefits; proximity buffers; design to avoid overlooking; property blight support schemes

Rights of way / access	10–15%	“loss of footpaths”; “bridleways disturbed”	Safeguard/upgrade PROW; no net loss; green corridors; setbacks from paths; wayfinding and surfacing
Flood risk & drainage	5–10%	“increased flooding”	Catchment-wide drainage plan; permeable design; no-build flood zones; independent hydrology review
Privacy/CCTV & security feel	5–10%	“CCTV and compromised privacy”	Minimise mast heights; inward-facing cameras; vegetative screening; security by design
Geopolitics & supply chain	5–10%	“Chinese products... cyber kill switches”; “target for thieves”	Transparent sourcing; cybersecurity certification; anti-theft design; local content where possible
Health & wellbeing	10–15%	“stress & RA flares”; “mental health impacts”	Health impact assessment; noise limits; visual buffers; resident support during construction
Pylons vs undergrounding	5–10%	“pylons blight”; “underground cabling please”	Commit to underground grid connections near communities; minimise corridor width

Table 3: Residents’ responses grouped according to the 14 main concern themes derived from AI assisted coding. Many responses combine themes, and percentages thus indicate the proportion of all 211 respondents referring to each. Indicative quotes have been edited for brevity.

Across all themes, respondents consistently called for removing or major scaling back of the scheme (particularly Land Area C); implementing wide buffers and screening; safeguarding wildlife corridors and public rights of way; providing clearer (more transparent) plans and assessing these via more independent oversight. Many comments also urged prioritising rooftop or brownfield solar; enforcing strict construction controls; ensuring robust BESS safety measures, and providing underground grid cabling near communities.

Too big. Impossible to mitigate in such a large area. It will destroy our countryside, change biodiversity, reduce our growing capacity, and we will live here with fire risk from substations.

Consideration must be made for the quality of life of people who chose to live in the south Cambridgeshire countryside and future food production.

I also worry about who eventually benefits from such installations. Not the community, that is for sure. You ruin our countryside, remove productive farming, destroy wildlife habitats, and make a hefty profit that likely ends up in the hands of large corporations.

Notably, concerns about property values, often seen as a hallmark of “NIMBY” opposition, were among the least mentioned concerns, ranking second from last. This finding reinforces the overall pattern in the data strongly indicating that community opposition to the proposed Kingsway project is primarily rooted in environmental, community and wellbeing concerns rather than personal financial interests.

Section Six: Hopes for the future

The final section of the survey captured respondents’ ‘hopes or concerns’ about the future of the Kingsway Solar proposal, inviting them to look ahead and share their views through open-ended responses. All but 17 participants took up this invitation, contributing more than 3,200 words of detailed commentary. With a 92% response rate, this section demonstrates the exceptionally high level of community engagement evident throughout the survey.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (~70–75% expressed a single, clear hope: that the proposed Kingsway Solar project would be cancelled outright, describing its size, location and design as poorly planned and wholly inappropriate warning of the irreversible loss of valuable farmland, open landscapes and wildlife corridors. Roughly a quarter of respondents said that if the project could not be stopped, it should be significantly reduced in scale.

A smaller group (~5%) expressed conditional support, acknowledging the need for renewable energy, but insisting it be delivered in more appropriate ways, such as rooftop solar and brownfield installations. Only two respondents (<1% of the survey pool) expressed unconditional support for the scheme.

My hope is that the proposed future of the solar farm is reduced in size considerably. Use land that isn't fit for agriculture purposes.

Mainly, I hope it can be stopped. If it does go ahead, my primary concern would be to influence the design to minimise adverse effects on the community and the environment, and to maximise the improvements to the environment which it is within their power to make. Finally, if it does go ahead, we need a benefits package on our terms.

While I don't have the answers to global warming, I feel that reducing consumption of energy rather than increasing energy production may be a better solution.

I HOPE that the government will put in place a land use strategy that prohibits the construction of solar parks on productive farmland. My concern is that we will lose access to the surrounding countryside which we use for recreation, and which benefits our health and mental wellbeing so profoundly. This land will not return to productive farmland after 40 years because the families and traditions will have been

lost. The use of huge warehouse roofs, car parks & public buildings must be prioritised.

Some respondents indicated they or others would leave the area if the Kingsway Solar proposal was approved:

The villages will die, as there is no reason to stay here

I hope someone in parliament sees sense and puts a stop to it. Otherwise, it's just another reason the country is losing the plot and time to think about moving abroad!

I visit Weston Colville at least once or twice a week to look after my grandchildren. I was hoping to move into the village and was preparing to make an offer on a house when the news of this proposal broke. All our plans are now put on hold. I am worried for my family. If this proposal goes ahead they will want to leave but will be unlikely to be able to sell their house for some time.

Beyond immediate objections, many comments reflected deeper anxiety about the lack of consultation, the perceived disregard for rural communities and the wider implications for public trust in the energy transition.

The policy makers should collaborate with members of the local communities who will be impacted by the proposal, to create local initiatives.

I hope that it will never happen, but am 100% certain that it will be imposed on us as our current government completely ignores the feelings and wellbeing of our rural communities.

If the government is really keen to deliver an effective green transition they must prioritise community involvement. They must deliver and communicate a clear, joined up plan for land use and renewables. They must have a regulator who sets clear boundaries around permissible and impermissible energy plant development, and they must prioritise mechanisms to address genuine public concern. Simply running roughshod over all of this in the name of meeting targets is folly. It will set back rather than advance the Green Transition. Kingsway sadly epitomises the worst elements of the target approach to Net Zero.

Overall, responses in Section Six reaffirm the dominant themes running throughout the survey: widespread opposition to the Kingsway project, deep attachment to the countryside, and concern about how renewable energy policy is being implemented. Among the 195 responses received to the final survey question, averaging over 150 words each, many combined local concerns—such as wildlife loss, flooding or fire risk—with broader fears about governance, stewardship of rural land, and intergenerational loss.

In this closing section, respondents often wrote personally and emotionally, describing feelings of grief, fear and 'dread' at the prospect of losing landscapes central to their lives. Their reflections capture both the immediate and long-term dimensions of community anxiety: the near horizon impacts of large-scale infrastructure on daily life, and the deeper

uncertainties about nature, food security and the integrity of future environmental governance in the longer term.

Conclusions

Taken together across all six sections, the survey findings reveal unequivocally strong and unified opposition to the proposed Kingsway Solar project, with >90% of respondents opposed and 86.3% strongly opposed. The highest levels of concern centre on the project's unprecedented scale, inappropriate location and destructive impact on nature and wildlife. Closely linked concerns include the loss of treasured rural landscapes and ways of life, the irreversible industrialisation of productive farmland, and the erosion of South Cambridgeshire's distinctive quiet, scenic and historic rural character, defined by its open and expansive views, with traditional field patterns and hedgerows. Other major issues include visual intrusion, risks of contamination to the chalk aquifers and River Stour, the encirclement of villages, and battery storage safety. Disruption from construction traffic on narrow rural roads also features prominently, alongside a wider sense of mistrust towards the developers driven by poor communication and lack of transparency.

Respondents' extensive comments, while unified in their opposition, reveal complex rationales that combine strong emotion, personal experience and deep regard for the communal character of village life. Many acknowledged, and a majority support, the importance of renewable energy and national Net Zero targets, but viewed the Kingsway Solar proposal as an inappropriate and destructive approach. For most respondents, the main driving concern was not opposition to renewable energy itself, but a conviction that large-scale industrial energy projects located in rural areas are the wrong way to deliver it. Across the detailed submissions, respondents argued that the permanent loss of farmland (which 48 respondents specifically linked to food security), harm to wildlife (raised in around one-third of all comments) and reduced access to the countryside would far outweigh the potential benefits of such a scheme. Vital though the need for greener energy solutions may be, respondents felt they should be better planned, using more robust criteria and based on reciprocal community participation.

Methodologically, the survey achieved an exceptionally high level of engagement, with all 211 participants completing the main questions and providing nearly 30,000 words of written feedback -- a response rate far exceeding typical local consultation levels.

In sociological terms, the responses highlight a dominant concern that can be summarised as the protection of what is known as 'rurality' (see references below). More than a geographic or spatial concept, rurality encompasses a combination of material, environmental and cultural characteristics, such as traditional buildings and landscapes, tilled fields, livestock pastures, hedgerows, woodlands, bridleways, footpaths and meadows, that together define both the physical environment and the cultural identity of rural communities. Protecting such landscapes has long been recognised in planning and policy, and the survey findings confirm that these values remain central to local identity, wellbeing, and stewardship of place.

The overwhelming perception among respondents is that industrialising the wide, upland landscapes of South Cambridgeshire would mark the end of village life as it has been known for centuries. Even the prospect of such change has already generated significant stress, worry, and adverse effects on mental health.

Yet, in contrast to their opposition to the proposed Kingsway Solar project, residents consistently expressed strong support for the principle of the green transition. More than half favoured rooftop and small-scale solar, about one-third supported community-owned energy projects, and a similar proportion prioritised home energy efficiency. Many also emphasised the importance of better transport, recycling, and biodiversity initiatives. These suggestions demonstrate a willingness to contribute to national energy goals through fairer, more localised and environmentally sensitive approaches that strengthen, rather than diminish the countryside.

At the same time, a recurrent thread in the data is concern about ‘greenwashing’ — the belief that governments and corporations use the language of sustainability to mask profit-driven or poorly planned initiatives. This perception, reinforced by negative experiences of the Kingsway consultation process (with 76% reporting dissatisfaction), risks undermining public trust in the wider green transition. This pattern is consistent with evidence that community acceptance of large-scale solar hinges less on general support for renewables than on perceptions of procedural fairness, transparency and local inclusion in decision-making.^{3,4}

Taken together, the dataset reveals three central and interwoven strands. First is the very high level of opposition to the proposed Kingsway Solar project, based on its vast scale, inappropriate location and damaging effects on the rural countryside. Second is the broad support for renewable energy and the desire to participate in the green transition, including through community-based initiatives. Third, is the frustration and mistrust over the gap between these two positions, in other words, between the ideals of sustainability and the realities of how such projects are planned and implemented.

From the perspective of the local residents who participated in this study, the consensus is clear: the proposed Kingsway Solar project is not the right path forward. However, the enormous volume of detailed responses from survey participants point to many constructive alternatives. In addition, and pointedly, they emphasise that genuine community engagement, smaller-scale and rooftop renewables, and the protection of farmland and biodiversity must become more central to energy planning in both the short and long term if public support for the green transition is to be increased rather than lost. This finding suggests, moreover, that very large industrial developments in rural areas close to residential villages may not only be unpopular and fiercely resisted, but can potentially compromise the objectives they are intended to deliver. A more effective approach suggested by the findings of this research would be to more successfully align green energy generation with local participation, environmental protection and long-term sustainability, demonstrating that there is a better, more balanced – and more popular --

way to deliver the green transition.

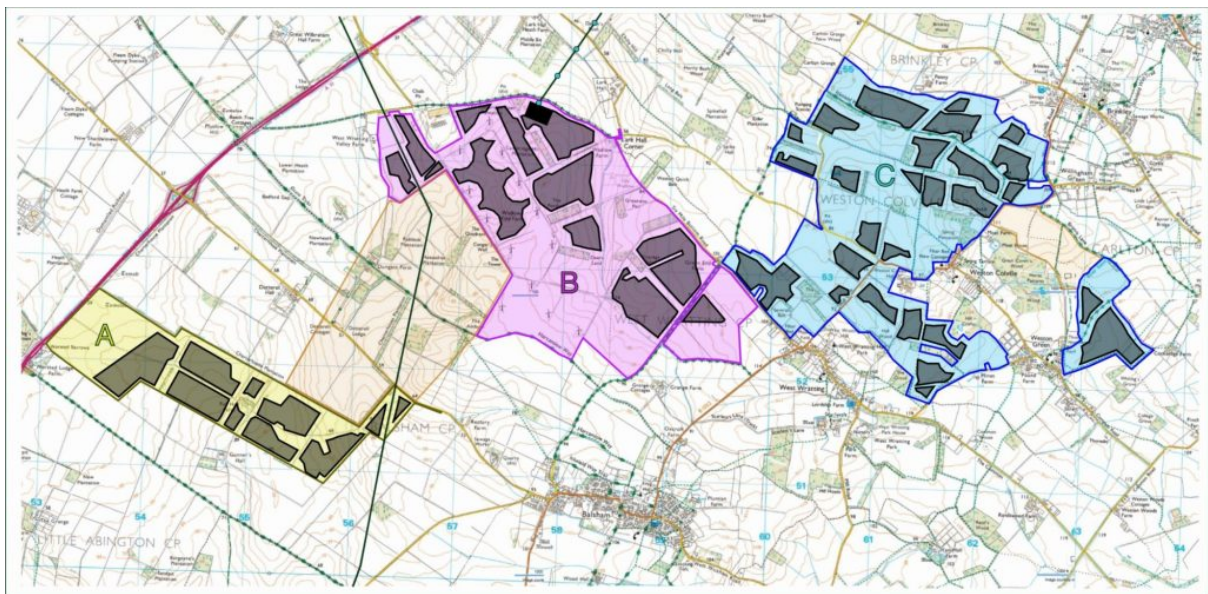
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Appendix 1

The Kingsway Solar proposal

The Kingsway solar power plant that is being proposed by the private investment firm Downing LLP in partnership with Bagnall Energy is currently one of the largest solar farm proposals in the UK or Europe, covering an area of 1246 hectares, or 3079 acres, ten to 15 miles east of Cambridge, adjacent to the villages of Balsham, West Wrating, Weston Colville, Brinkley, Carlton, Willingham Green, Great Wilbraham, West Wickham and Six Mile Bottom.



The proposal is designed to deliver 500 MW of solar energy through a combination of solar PV arrays, battery storage (BESS) facilities and a 15 kilometre pylon corridor connecting the facility to the Burwell South substation.

Since the project is large enough to qualify as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) it is not subject to local planning but will be assessed by the Government Planning Inspectorate and the Secretary of State for Energy.

The Kingsway project is currently the subject of a statutory consultation period that will close on 29 October 2025.

For further information about Kingsway visit: <https://kingswaysolarfarm.co.uk/>

To learn more about Kingsway Solar Community Action visit:
<https://kingswaysolarcommunityaction.co.uk/>

Appendix 2

A Note on Authorship

This study was conducted by the Kingsway Solar Community Action Group in order to assess local community views of the proposed Kingsway Solar project. It is intended to contribute to local, regional and national debate about the role of renewables, and in particular large solar energy facilities in rural areas, as part of the green transition. The study is also designed to gather data relevant to the statutory consultation.

This Report was coauthored by Kathy Day and Sarah Franklin on behalf of Kingsway Solar Community Action and is made available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC license.

Publication date 24 October 2025

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Appendix 3

Kingsway Solar Farm – Community Feedback Survey

We'd like to hear your views on the proposed Kingsway Solar Farm and how it may affect your wellbeing, lifestyle, and connection to the local area. Your feedback will help shape our community response to the Statutory Consultation.

1. Your overall opinion

How do you feel about the proposed Kingsway Solar Farm?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Neutral
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

Please share why you feel this way:

2. Understanding the green transition

What does the term "green transition" mean to you?

3. Contributing to the Green Transition

Do you have any suggestions for how our local community could contribute to the green transition (e.g. sustainability, clean energy, local action)?

4. Connection to nature and the land

How would you describe your connection to the local landscape and its agricultural heritage?

- Very strong
- Moderate
- Minimal
- Not sure

5. Wellbeing and lifestyle impact

How do you think the solar farm might affect your personal wellbeing?

- Positively
- Negatively
- No impact
- Not sure

6. Using the 5 Steps to Wellbeing, which statements apply to you?

Connecting with Others

- I value being part of a community, especially through local events in natural surroundings
- I enjoy connecting with others through outdoor activities like countryside walks
- I worry that reduced access to unspoilt countryside may limit these

opportunities

I don't feel strongly about this

Other: _____

Being Active

I enjoy walking and spending time outdoors

Access to green space helps me stay physically active

I rarely use outdoor spaces

Other: _____

Taking Notice

I value natural views and peaceful surroundings

Being in nature helps me relax and reflect

I don't usually notice these things

Other: _____

Keep Learning

I'm interested in learning more about nature and sustainability

I'd welcome more local opportunities to explore these topics

I'm not very interested in this area

Other: _____

Giving

I want to play a part in a greener, more sustainable future

I'd like to get involved in local environmental efforts

I'm unsure how I could contribute

Other: _____

Feel free to expand on your answers:

7. Main Concerns

What concerns do you have about the proposed solar farm? (Select all that apply)

Visual impact on the landscape

Impact on wildlife or nature

Loss of productive farmland

Construction traffic or noise

Poor communication or lack of transparency

I don't have any major concerns

Other (please specify): _____

Would you like to elaborate?

8. Looking Ahead

What are your main hopes or concerns for the future regarding the Kingsway Solar Farm?