Kingsway Solar Community Action

Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP
Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
55 Whitehall
London SW1A 2HP

3 November 2025

Dear Secretary of State

Concerns regarding DESNZ's Public Attitudes Tracker and interpretation of public support for solar farms

I write on behalf of Kingsway Solar Community Action (KSCA) following the publication of the *DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker for renewable energy: Summer 2025*, which was recently reported in Solar Power Portal. We welcome the Department's ongoing efforts to understand public attitudes towards renewable energy and to inform policy development supporting the green transition.

However, after reviewing your latest findings alongside the results of our *Community Assessments of the Proposed Kingsway Solar Project* (October 2025), we have identified several important discrepancies that raise questions about how DESNZ measures and interprets public "support" for solar energy — particularly large-scale, industrial solar developments in rural areas.

This assessment uses Kingsway Solar to illustrate a key point: public support is project-dependent, changing with development scale, siting and community impact.

Divergent findings

Your Summer 2025 Tracker reports that **43% of respondents would be "happy"** for a solar farm to be constructed in their local area, compared with only **14% "unhappy"**. In contrast, our community study of 211 residents directly affected by the **K**ingsway Solar Project in South Cambridgeshire found that **over 90% of respondents were opposed** to the scheme, and **86% were strongly opposed**.

Your report presents overall support for renewables at 80%; while our findings show that a similar proportion of residents support renewable energy, they still reject large, industrial-scale solar installations that transform agricultural and rural landscapes, favouring

rooftop and brownfield developments instead. These positions are not contradictory: they reflect **different understandings of "solar energy"**; rooftop and community-owned schemes on the one hand and multi-thousand-acre industrial developments on the other.

Sampling and representation

KSCA are concerned that the Tracker's broad national sampling (n≈3,500) and generic question wording obscure local variations and site-specific impacts. For example:

- The Tracker does not distinguish between small-scale rooftop solar, brownfield developments and large agricultural solar farms.
- Rural respondents, who experience these developments most directly, represent only a small subset of your national data.
- Reported "happiness" for a local solar farm (43%) may therefore reflect abstract approval of renewables, rather than informed consent to major land-use change near people's homes.

We respectfully request clarification on how DESNZ accounts for these distinctions in its data analysis.

Community Benefits and Local Realities

We note that the Tracker reports that *"at least half said they would be incentivised by energy bill discounts for those living near new infrastructure (62%), funding for community projects such as home insulation, community facilities and local nature projects (59%), and provision of local jobs and apprenticeships (58%)."*

Our community's experience with the Kingsway Solar proposal suggests that the reality is very different. Industrial-scale solar developments do not provide meaningful local benefits, do not create local jobs and do not increase biodiversity in the way the public might expect from DESNZ's question framing.

- Community benefits are entirely at the discretion of the developer, with no enforceable standards or oversight to guarantee delivery or fairness.
- Employment opportunities are almost entirely limited to short-term construction roles filled by specialist contractors from outside the region.
- Promised biodiversity gains often rely on unverified offset calculations rather than independent ecological monitoring.

The gap between the Tracker's findings and lived experience therefore risks creating a misleading impression that large solar projects inherently deliver tangible benefits to local communities. In practice, these benefits are uncertain, unevenly distributed and largely symbolic.

Changing public perception and scale of development

Differences in attitudes toward local solar farms may reflect the gap between a hypothetical idea and a real proposal, but scale is the more significant factor. The UK's first large-scale solar farm, Cleve Hill in Kent, has only recently come online, meaning most public experience relates to smaller, low-impact installations with limited visual or amenity effects. In contrast, the Kingsway Solar proposal is a 500MW NSIP covering 1,246 hectares, representing a step change in scale and impact.

As the video regarding the Cleve Hill Solar Farm vividly demonstrates, the sheer scale and industrial appearance of new projects bear little resemblance to earlier examples of solar energy infrastructure. The difference in visual impact and land-take is fundamental — and it is changing public perception rapidly.

It is therefore misleading to assume that past levels of "support for solar" in national tracking data will apply to the new generation of multi-thousand-acre industrial schemes now being proposed. We urge DESNZ to update its survey questions and analysis framework to reflect this significant shift in context.

Wellbeing and community impact

Our survey incorporated the NHS "Five Steps to Wellbeing" model and found that **nearly 90% of respondents expect negative wellbeing impacts** if the Kingsway Solar project proceeds. These effects arise from loss of countryside access, landscape change and anxiety about safety and food security.

We note that DESNZ's Tracker currently collects **no wellbeing data**, despite growing evidence that environmental change and planning decisions can significantly affect mental and community health. Adding wellbeing indicators would align the Tracker with national health objectives and provide a fuller picture of how energy policy affects people and places.

Engagement, communication and trust

Our community's experience also exposes serious weaknesses in how large-scale solar developers engage with local people. In our survey, **76% of residents reported dissatisfaction with the consultation process** for the Kingsway Solar Project, citing poor communication, incomplete or misleading information and a clear lack of appreciation for the local environment, community and landscape.

The consultation undertaken by Kingsway Solar felt procedural rather than participatory—a box-ticking exercise designed to inform rather than to listen. Local MP Pippa Heylings has also expressed serious concerns, describing "*an extremely poor-quality level of engagement by the developer*" and noting that she "*expected the Kingsway representatives … to both prepare better to answer constituents' questions and listen much harder to what constituents are actually asking and commenting on*." Her comments highlight the growing gap between the principles of community engagement assumed in national surveys and the reality of large-scale solar proposals on the ground.

This approach erodes public trust not only in developers but also in the planning system and government policy. We therefore urge DESNZ to recognise that meaningful engagement is central to public acceptance of renewable energy infrastructure. Future waves of the Public Attitudes Tracker could better reflect this by measuring trust, procedural fairness and the perceived quality of engagement, rather than relying solely on abstract levels of "support" or "awareness."

Key Questions for DESNZ

We therefore ask DESNZ to respond to the following points:

1. How does the Department differentiate between attitudes toward industrial-scale solar projects and community or rooftop installations in its data collection and reporting?

2. What proportion of rural respondents in the Tracker have direct experience of, or proximity to, existing solar developments?

3. Why does the Tracker omit wellbeing or social impact measures when these are integral to energy transition outcomes?

4. How does DESNZ ensure that "high national support" is not misinterpreted as blanket consent for industrial energy schemes on prime farmland?

5. Will future Tracker waves include questions addressing trust in renewable developers, fairness of consultation and perceived community benefit?

Our community is strongly supportive of renewable energy and the green transition. However, we believe that the form, scale and location of development matter profoundly to public acceptance. The current DESNZ reporting framework risks overstating support by failing to capture these distinctions.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how community-level evidence such as ours might inform future iterations of the Public Attitudes Tracker, ensuring that energy policy reflects not only national averages but also the lived realities of local communities.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Day

on behalf of **Kingsway Solar Community Action**
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Cc Will Norman, Solar Power Portal; Pippa Heylings MP, South Cambridgeshire