



Ramblers Association Cambridge Group

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Ramblers Association Cambridge Group response to consultation of Kingsway Solar proposals around Balsham, West Wratting, Weston Green, Weston Colville and Willingham Green.

This response by the Ramblers Association Cambridge Group is a summary of the views, concerns and suggestions to the consultation on the solar proposal in East and South Cambridgeshire. Whilst we recognise that this is a development that will contribute to achieving the UK Government’s commitment to ‘net-zero’ carbon emissions by 2050. 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.

The Ramblers believes it is important for any developments in the countryside to be located and designed in a way that protects and enhances precious landscapes; improves access to the outdoors; works with nature; and supports local communities and sustainable development. We recognise that we face a climate emergency and that urgent action is needed to reduce carbon emissions, reverse nature loss and create a healthier environment for people and wildlife. We support measures to mitigate this by switching to renewable sources of energy including the use of solar photovoltaic technology. However, solar arrays should be installed as close to the point of use as possible, with particular use made of roofs on homes and large public or commercial buildings. We suggest more use could be made of putting solar arrays over the park and ride car parks and travel hubs. When there is a need for large-scale solar arrays these should be sensitively situated so that they do not damage valued landscapes.

We have three main objections and have made alternative proposals

Objections	Alternative proposals
A. The siting of the array of panels near Weston Green and Cocksedge Farm in Area C	Use Area A adjacent to the A11 instead
B. Negative impact on Icknield Way	Set solar arrays back and have substantial screening either side of the Icknield Way.
C. Siting of main BESS in Area B off Byway 251/23	Site main BESS adjacent to the grain storage unit on west side and avoid use of Byway 251/23 for HGVs and maintenance vehicles.

A. We object to the proposal to put an array of panels near Weston Green and Cocksedge Farm in Area C and the arrangements for vehicle access during construction. The reasons for our objections include:

1. There is no reasonable HGV vehicle access for this site. The options presented are either through Weston Colville or along Brook Lane Byways 40/7, 40/9 and 251/15 – neither are good options.

2. The proposal is to temporarily convert Brook Lane Byways 40/7, 40/9 and 251/15 to be used by heavy goods vehicles. Brook Lane is subject to flooding near the river crossing. Brook Lane is very rural in character, and a largely tree lined lane that is very pleasant to use for non motorised users. Many public rights of way link into it, creating a wide range of circular and linear walks and rides. There are no estimates of how many HGV movements there might be along Brook Lane in Table 11.19, nor for how long these will continue.
3. It results in the permanent loss of part of Public Right of Way footpath 251/18 part of a route between Weston Green and Carlton.
4. There are no proposals for any new PROW so footpath 40/15 would become a dead end path and unlikely to be used regularly leading to a further loss of footpath through disuse. Proposals could have been made for a new PROW to connect footpath 40/15 to footpath 40/16 near Cocksedge Farm and byway 251/15 running in a NW/SE direction thus mitigating having a dead-end path and some compensation for the permanent closure of 251/18.

Alternative proposal

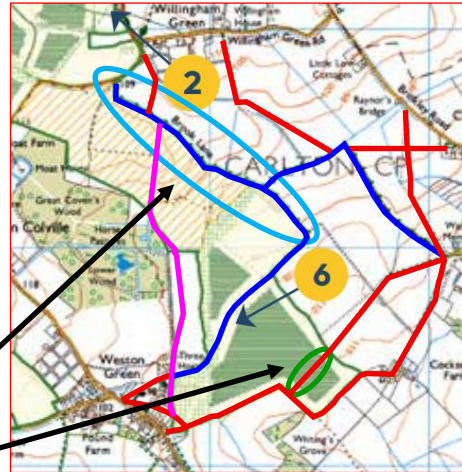
The area identified for this array is relatively small and it is at some distance from other arrays in Area C so it necessitates an inter-array connection with overhead lines in the fields south of Brook Lane. **Is this array not better placed in Area A adjacent to the A11 dual carriageway?** Drivers might have visibility of the panel arrays for just seconds as they drive along the A11 unlike walkers and other non-motorised users who would have visibility of arrays in area C for up to an hour of their walk or ride.

The area identified for ecological and landscape enhancement in area A could then be relocated to alongside the Icknield Way to mitigate the impact of the solar development along this historic route.

Given the huge disruption to local communities that will arise from the implementation of this project, it is imperative that disturbances to local PROW networks are kept to a minimum, both during construction and long-term. Should this array go ahead ALL vehicle access should be provided **along a new, temporary haul road built on land that forms part of the development area**. No existing PROW should be used. It is inconceivable that byway 251/15 could EVER be returned to its current rural charm after being turned into a road. And this road will have to take large, heavy lorries – so will require a total transformation.

Using Area A adjacent to the A11 would resolve the issue of needing to use Brook Lane for an access road for HGVs and would avoid the need for extinguishing footpath 251/18.

Proposed 'upgrade' to 'haul road' for HGVs
Proposed closure (extinguishing circular walk)

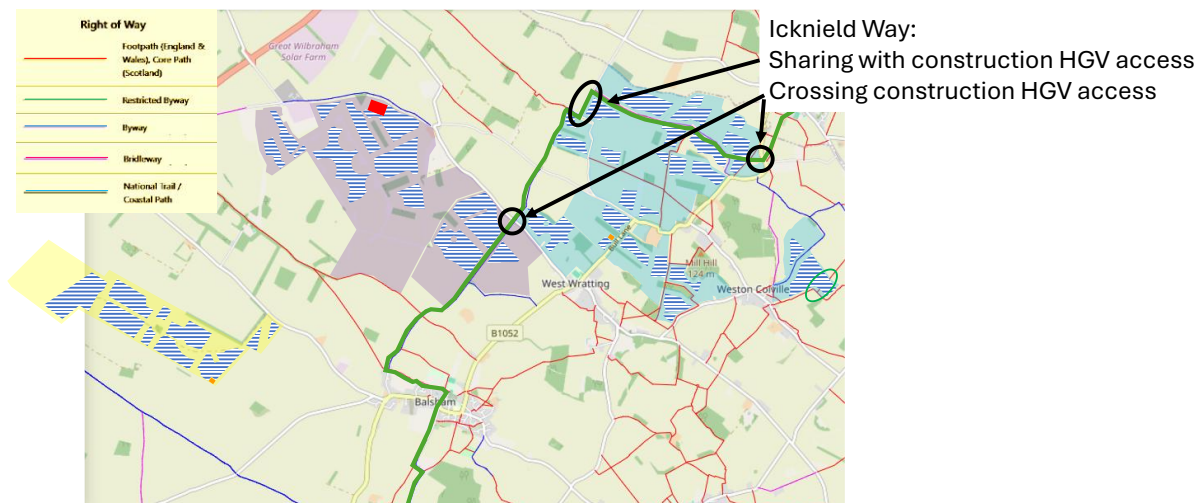


B. We object to the huge and negative impact on the Icknield Way. The Icknield Way is an important and historical route that is regularly used by walkers. The reasons that it is important are: it is the connection between the two other significant historical routes, the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. This connection makes for a popular and well used circular route. And it connects to Harcamlow Way too.

The reasons for our objections:

1. There are panel arrays on both sides of the path with the risk of turning the path into a developed corridor, completely altering the experience of walking in the countryside.
2. The length of path that is affected by panels on **both sides** is the section Byway 254/17 south of Green End Farm and Bridleway 40/2 east and west of Cricks Farm. These sections make a total length of 3 kilometres that would take some 50 minutes to walk through.
3. There are further footpaths with arrays on **one side** of the Icknield Way Byway 254/3 and 40/1, a distance of 0.41 kilometres. It could take up to an hour to walk along the Icknield Way with panel arrays alongside. Tables 7.12 and 7.15 all assess the visual impact along this section as high impact but there are no proposals for how to mitigate the high visual impact.
4. There is a section of the Icknield Way that is along Grange Road for 0.41 kilometres between grid refs 603545 and 607548. This road is proposed to be a main access road for the construction and maintenance heavy goods vehicles. The road is very narrow with no pavement or grassy verge and presents a risk to walkers and horse riders especially during the construction phase that could be 24-36 months long. To keep this section of the Icknield Way open we would expect that a temporary footpath could be created along the field edge behind the hedgerow on the western side for this section of Grange Road. Ideally this temporary footpath could be made into a permanent PROW to create a more pleasant section for the Icknield Way instead of road walking.

- There are two construction HGV access routes that cross the Icknield Way. As a minimum safety signage needs to be put in place to alert drivers to pedestrians crossing and visa versa.



The Ramblers would like to see the position of the solar panel arrays adjusted to be set back from the Icknield Way and to have a ten metre strip of woodland and hedgerow planting on either side of this historic route.

C. We object to the siting of the main BESS in Area B

The proposed site for the BESS in Area B is along Byway 251/23 to the east of a triangle of woodland Old Cambridge Road Plantation. The BESS is likely to have a footprint of 2,000-5,000 square metres and may use between 20-40 containers that can be up to 20 feet high. Extra space is also needed for screening, fencing and a fire safety zone. Our objection is that it Turns Byway 251/23 into a haul road for HGVs and creates a large building disrupting the views of a farmed landscape. **Our alternative proposal is that the BESS should be located adjacent to the existing grain storage facility** preferably on the west side. This would contain the view of industrialised units into one area rather than two separate areas for the grain store and the BESS. It would also reduce the use of Byway 251/23 by HGVs during construction and during ongoing operational maintenance.

Byway 251/23 is a regularly used route for Ramblers as it makes a triangular route along Fleam Dyke, the Icknield Way and bridleway 254/21. This route is published in 'Walks in South Cambridgeshire' Third edition (2000). Our alternative proposal for siting the BESS would reduce the conflict between HGVs and walkers and other non-motorised users.

What proposals are there for screening the BESS?

Other concerns and mitigations

- The potential **loss or diversion of PROWs** temporary or permanent. PROWs have legal protection through the Highways Act 1980. The Ramblers would like to be consulted during the development of the PROW Management Plan.

2. The **reduction of wildlife**, flora and fauna, observed on walks. What are the ecological and landscape enhancements being considered? There is opportunity to manage the land under and around the panels to promote biodiversity. Kingsway should work with credible partners such as the RSPB or Wildlife Trust, there is no evidence of collaboration so far. The RSPB has good recommendations for the management of land to support biodiversity. Kingsway should adopt the standardised approach to monitoring biodiversity on solar farms published in 2022 and work to continue to optimise land use for nature.
3. Security fencing either side of a footpath could lead to a sense of being enclosed in a corridor particularly along the Icknield Way. The minimum standard width for a footpath is 1.5 metres and a bridleway 3 metres. We would suggest that the minimum width of any fenced path should be significantly wider, reflecting the change in environment and especially the potential for churning up of soft surfaces which must be retained. Bridleways must be wide enough for horses to pass easily. Footpaths naturally connect one area to another so they can be the opportunity to create good wildlife corridors with good planting of wild flowers and hedgerows providing a good habitat and supporting wildlife to travel from one area to another. Having footpath widths of 5 metres or more reduces the sense of walking in a corridor and maintains the sense of being in the countryside.
4. There are no particular details of the **fencing and natural planting** around the solar arrays. Any new natural planting will take three to seven years to establish and become an effective screen. Given that the panels highest point is 3.5 metres above ground it is likely that screening will take the maximum period to reduce the visual impact. We would expect to see Kingsway Solar being required to have an active maintenance programme for the hedgerows and PROWs throughout the lifetime of the solar farm. In the first two years watering is a critical activity so as not to see the failures like we have along the A14. Also trimming the hedgerows to avoid the footpaths becoming overgrown or neglected.
5. Cambridgeshire is relatively depleted of **woodlands** so retaining all woodlands of all ages, not just ancient woodlands, is important. Area C has many small pockets of existing woodland that would benefit from creating woodland corridors by locating the areas indicated for planting proposals to make the connections. Hall Wood has not been identified as an ancient woodland on the Kingsway maps. Any land that is currently woodland should not be destroyed during the creation and management of the solar farm. Any poor quality woodland such as recent losses of Ash trees could be enhanced with selective interplanting. There are a number of ancient woodlands in the area including Hall Wood, Lower Wood and Great Coven Wood. Ancient is defined as being over 400 years old. The Wildlife Trust has recently surveyed and is updating the register of ancient woods, updates are available from Natural England. Again connection between woodlands is important so even less mature woods need protecting. Paths

through our local woods are particularly precious and should not be destroyed to create land for solar panels.

6. **Glint and glare** from panels can be unpleasant and unsightly. Area B Central under the wind turbines is a particular high spot that can be seen from many parts of south and east Cambridgeshire so will be visible from miles around. The proposals to mitigate the glint and glare are awaited in the Environmental Statement in the Development Consent Order.

Summary

The Ramblers have three main objections. One is the site of the panel array on the small segregated area of land in Area C that would be much better placed in Area A near the A11. The second is the overall negative impact on the Icknield Way that is very regularly used by non motorised users. We would like to see mitigations for this negative impact through adjusting the positioning of the arrays and greater planting adjacent to the Icknield Way. The third is the siting of the main BESS on Byway 251/23 that would be better sited adjacent to the grain storage facility. We would like to see mitigations for this negative impact.

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Chair Cambridge Ramblers Group

References

[Microsoft Word - RSPB solar enhancement talk + package](#) Recommendations on land management under and around solar panels for biodiversity gain by RSPB.

[Solar-Panels-and-Wildlife-Review-2019.pdf](#) BSG summary of research of impact of solar on biodiversity specifically birds, bats and aquatic invertebrates

[SEUK-2024-Solar-Habitat-Report.pdf](#) Solar Energy UK: Industry recommendations for good practice including a Standard Approach to Monitoring Biodiversity in Solar Farms created in 2022.