



The countryside charity
Norfolk

CPRE Norfolk Position Statement **Solar farms**

We think that the gold standard for onshore renewable energy done well means community energy - renewable energy projects proposed, designed, and owned by local people. We know that the climate emergency threatens to damage many of our most loved landscapes and ecosystems. Places that are precious to us all, including the Broads, the north Norfolk coast and the wildlife-packed Brecks, could all be changed irreparably as our climate shifts.

We need to act fast to cut our greenhouse gas emissions, and to do that we need more low-carbon renewable energy. We want to see these new renewable energy projects done well, in a way that minimises impacts on landscapes, and makes sure that the rural communities who host wind turbines or solar farms get to keep the money these schemes generate.

Solar Farms

As well as supporting such schemes, CPRE Norfolk is aware of a recent increase in applications for large solar farms, which has increased the potential for cumulative negative impact on the landscape. The environmental objective of developing renewable energy through large solar farms should not come at the expense of the beauty, character and tranquillity of Norfolk's countryside.

- Small scale domestic installations, particularly in urban areas can have minimal landscape impact. However, the impacts of commercial photovoltaic farms with their associated infrastructure in rural landscapes will frequently be difficult to mitigate. Sites more likely to be acceptable will be flat, lack complex field boundaries and will be difficult to view from surrounding landscapes. Sloping sites (more than 5% gradient) with complex field patterns and significant cultural landscape features are likely to be inappropriate for solar farm development.
- Grade 1, 2 and 3a farmland is in itself a major renewable energy resource as well as supporting the supply of food, and is defined as being 'the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) in the NPPF. It is undesirable to take one renewable energy resource out of effective use in order to develop another.
- The increased number of applications for solar farms increases the potential for detrimental cumulative effects on the countryside.

What CPRE Norfolk is campaigning for:

- Greater weight for local landscape issues. Renewable energy targets should not be allowed to override concerns about the damage solar farms can do to the landscape.
- Stronger local landscape policies in Local Plans. It is of course important to protect conservation areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty from the negative impact of solar farms. But the majority of Norfolk is undesignated landscape and it is here that most people enjoy their countryside as they walk the footpath network or cycle along by-roads. Much of this so called 'ordinary' countryside is very attractive

and tranquil and equally deserving of protection from visual intrusion by industrial-scale photovoltaic arrays. Local Planning Authorities need to include strong local landscape policies in their local plans.

- Assessment of impacts. EIA screening is required at the application stage for all proposals exceeding 0.5 hectares (as set out in the EIA regs). Proposals should set out suitable assessments of impacts on biodiversity, hydrology, archaeology, landscape and possible cumulative effects. Transport assessment should consider access and vehicle movements during all stages of construction and development.
- Detailed planning conditions. Standard conditions should require: provision of appropriate screening, in the form of locally characteristic hedges or tree belts; coating of arrays in a non-reflecting material in order to minimise glare and visual impact, reversible construction techniques to permit restoration of the land after decommissioning (i.e. not concrete foundations); visually unobtrusive security fences which enable wildlife to pass freely; strict controls on lighting; appropriate vegetation management regimes (e.g. grazing); a clearly stipulated decommissioning date; legal agreement on land restoration measures after decommissioning.

The way forward must be based on the potential to harness technological advances in solar energy production which have minimal impacts on the landscape. It will become possible to “harvest” solar power from all manner of artificial surfaces including road surfaces, warehouse and factory roofs etc and these methodological breakthroughs, together with other new approaches such as producing hydrogen from plastic waste, will ultimately make farmland consuming, landscape destroying commercial photovoltaic solar farms redundant. CPRE Norfolk wants to see more effort, ingenuity and resources put into these new methods of producing renewable energy and, once again, when and where possible, with maximum input from the local community.

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This position statement is extracted from

[‘Onshore wind turbines, solar farms and pylons - Position Statement’](#)