



The countryside charity
Norfolk

CPRE Norfolk Position Statement **Solar farms & solar energy**

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. An increase in the amount of energy produced and used locally would help address the capacity limitations experienced by the National Grid and ultimately could reduce significantly the need to transmit large quantities of energy over great distances via pylon routes.

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. It is also important that schemes designed to harvest wind and solar energy are only permitted if they are supported by the rural communities most directly affected.

Solar Farms

CPRE supports the need for mandatory rooftop solar on suitable new domestic and commercial buildings, and retrofitting where possible but is concerned by a recent increase in applications for large solar farms, which has increased the potential for cumulative negative impacts on the landscape, as well as loss of agricultural food production.

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.

In particular, large-scale or mega size solar farm proposals put forward under the NSIP planning regime are bound to result in unacceptable harm to the countryside and those who experience it, as well as unwarranted impacts on food production and security. Therefore, CPRE Norfolk will object to these schemes.

Furthermore, we view all proposals for solar farms on Greenfield sites in the countryside as undesirable because the impacts of commercial photovoltaic farms with their associated infrastructure in rural landscapes is difficult to mitigate and CPRE Norfolk has a track record of opposing all such developments.

It is especially important that Grade 1, 2 and 3a farmland, defined as 'the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) in the NPPF, is protected. It is a finite resource and should be used for the growing of crops that are needed to provide our country with a reliable supply of affordable, nutritious food.

If, in spite of our opposition to solar farms on Greenfield sites, a scheme is permitted it is essential:

1. That the impacts of the development are fully assessed and where possible addressed.

These assessments should cover impacts on biodiversity, hydrology, archaeology, landscape, possible cumulative effects and the disruption resulting from access and vehicle movements during all stages of construction and development. The assessments should be carried out via an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). An EIA is required at the application stage for all proposals exceeding 0.5 hectares.

2. That detailed planning conditions are applied to ensure: 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 and a legal agreement on land restoration measures after decommissioning.

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 photo-voltaic 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.
- *A ban on the use of tall tracker solar arrays.*
Increasingly tracker solar panels are being used which can reach 4.5 metres in height. It is almost impossible to mitigate their visual impacts on the landscape and in particular on users of public rights of way. This type of solar panel should not be approved for use in the countryside.

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.

We already know from research carried out by the UCL Energy Institute for CPRE that installing solar panels on existing rooftops and other land such as car parks could provide at least 40-50GW of solar energy in England by 2035 and by 2050, with further investment, that there is potential to generate 117GW of low carbon electricity from roofs and other developed spaces - i.e. well in excess of the government's 2035 national target of 70GW.

The government should insist on rooftop solar for all new domestic and commercial buildings, and retrofitting where possible.

Given the great potential of harvesting solar energy from artificial surfaces proposals for solar farms, which usually have a projected life span of 60 years, should not be permitted. Why industrialise large areas of countryside for decades to come when there are much better alternatives available?

CPRE Norfolk wants to involve as many people as possible in its campaigning against large-scale solar farms proposed under the NSIP regime and has formed an Alliance of Parish and Town Councils, action groups, other organisations and individuals to oppose these schemes. You can join the Alliance by [visiting our campaigns page here](#).

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This position statement is extracted from
['Onshore wind turbines, solar farms and pylons - Position Statement'](#)