



Mega Solar Menace

By David Hook, Chair, Vision for Norfolk

CPRE Norfolk is extremely concerned about the number of very large-scale solar farms being planned in the county. This is due primarily to the fact that their construction would result in the industrialisation of large areas of attractive, tranquil countryside with solar panels, security fences, CCTV cameras, access tracks and substations covering huge numbers of fields and meadows. Tracker solar panels can reach up to 4.5m in height (almost as tall as a double storey house). Their visual impact, including on users of public rights of way, would be enormous. The loss of good quality agricultural arable land is also a major concern.

We are strongly of the opinion that climate change needs to be addressed and that reaching Net Zero is an essential goal, not least through mandatory solar on

suitable roof-spaces of new domestic and commercial properties. CPRE commissioned research by UCL which demonstrates that the solar energy requirement to reach net zero by 2050 can be exceeded by harvesting solar energy from roof tops and other artificial surfaces. There really is no need for solar on land.

Currently there are proposals for four mega size solar projects (*) in Norfolk making their way through the planning system and several more are being lined up. These huge projects, each one covering thousands of acres, are so large that they are treated as NSIP applications (Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects) whose fate is ultimately decided by the Secretary of State for Energy, Ed Miliband, rather than by the Local Planning Authority.

When the decision making process is so remote it is easy to feel helpless but CPRE Norfolk is acting to fight these proposals. In addition to responding formally at all stages in the NSIP planning process we have formed an Alliance of

Protecting Norfolk's Countryside: A Call to Action

Our natural environment continues to be sidelined by inadequate policy and a lack of urgency, particularly when compared to financial interests. One of the most pressing threats is the proliferation of large-scale solar farms across Norfolk. These industrial installations; characterised by extensive fencing, towering panels, and intrusive infrastructure, risk transforming our countryside into metal landscapes, isolating villages and degrading our rights of way.

We urge you to take action: contact your MP, raise concerns with your local council, and oppose these developments wherever possible. A more sustainable alternative would be to prioritise rooftop solar; making it affordable and mandatory for all new buildings.

The long-term impact of these solar farms could span centuries. Over the coming months, we will continue to actively oppose these plans and will need your support.

Despite these challenges, our team has made significant progress:

- We're launching an exciting initiative with schools across the region to inspire the next generation of countryside stewards. Special thanks to our dedicated trustees for leading this work.
- We're pleased to announce funding has been secured to celebrate our Centenary Year in 2026. We're planning something special, so stay tuned!

As we enter autumn, a season of reflection and renewal, I encourage you to explore and appreciate the landscapes we strive to protect. Meanwhile, let's keep the pressure on and ensure environmental protection remains a priority for years to come.



Elliot Nelson
Chair, CPRE Norfolk

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like-minded Councils and others to provide support in opposition to these proposed projects. A CPRE Norfolk member organised a Parliamentary Petition advocating solar on roofs and not on land. It was signed by over 27,000 people – well in excess of the number required (10,000) to secure a written response from the government.

CPRE Norfolk is planning a public exhibition to demonstrate the extreme impacts that mega solar schemes would have on the Norfolk landscape. As well as providing information the exhibition aims to persuade councillors, MPs and individuals to support our opposition to mega solar proposals. The exhibition is planned for November 20th and

will be held in Dereham Memorial Hall during the afternoon and early evening.

We consider our approach to Net Zero, solar on roofs not on land, to be “Renewables Done Well”. Mega solar on farmland, which would have such drastic consequences for the countryside, is definitely “Renewables done Badly”.

(*) Footnote

The 4 schemes are:

East Pye (south and east of Long Stratton)

Tasway (west of Long Stratton)

High Grove (in the Swaffham / Dereham area)

The Drovers (near Castle Acre)

New Towns, Old Mistakes?

By Chris Dady

The housing crisis and how to fix it has been on top of the political agenda for quite a while, with the government hoping that developers will solve the issue if they continue to create land development opportunities through local plans and remove the bureaucratic hurdles, such as planning (not our words!). The real issue, however, is the lack of affordable social housing, something that can only be addressed by direct state intervention as it was through the 1950s, 60s and 70s. But that is not the current policy at anything like the required scale, so we continue to see other ideas introduced in the hope that these may be a magic bullet. The latest initiative being - New Towns.

New Towns are not new. From Letchworth back in the early 1900s, through to Milton Keynes in 1967, both were developed by government agencies known as development corporations, to the new 25-year scheme at Northstowe near Cambridge, under the aegis of 'Homes England'. The earlier examples were developed following a set of new town principles, including a mix of uses, robust infrastructure, affordable homes, community engagement to foster well-being and social and economic progress, but most of all they were meant to create a self-sufficient, attractive and peaceful environment for living. Letchworth is a great example of this, with the development corporation morphing into the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which continues to invest in that community.

New towns by their nature are land hungry, and require entirely new sets of services, jobs and other infrastructure such as schools, shops and surgeries. Bear in mind our health care professionals are already in very short supply and that demonstrates just one challenge of this approach. To be successful they must be government sponsored if

the right level of infrastructure and services, including facilities, education and jobs, are to be achieved, in place ready for the first occupations. That is where we hit the buffers. We are a crowded country, so taking up more green field land is a huge issue. The schemes need a state funding mechanism, with housing treated as national infrastructure. Left to private developers we would not get the levels and timeliness of services and infrastructure needed - and we know there are not many new funds that can be afforded. Our building regulations and privatised utility service structure does not ensure sustainability, which is another issue.

There is in fact already more than sufficient land allocated for housing to meet all our needs without having to build new towns. Sadly, much of this is greenfield rather than brownfield sites, however the selection of a new town site in any area leaves all the existing allocations in place, creating even more cherry-picking opportunities for developers, who naturally develop the most profitable sites first. That is a huge issue, and one that knocks wish list sites such as in South Norfolk completely on the head. The loss of farmland, lack of infrastructure, threats to food security - the concreting over of land is already at a tipping point that we should not cross.

With the right development model, opportunities do exist on brownfield land which removes the concerns regarding loss of green fields. For example, if one of the two USAF bases of Lakenheath and Mildenhall were to be made available, we would have a site of sufficient size on brownfield land and either could easily have rail links to Cambridge to support that burgeoning community. The new town of Northstowe is on the site of the abandoned RAF Oakington airbase. Likewise, there are other major brownfield sites which could enable millions of new homes to be constructed and would offer themselves up as potential new town sites, particularly near London, the Midlands and North.

Continued overleaf



Northstowe

CPRE Norfolk Youth Engagement & School Awards 2025-2026

We're thrilled to launch the CPRE Norfolk Youth Engagement & Schools Awards, a brand new initiative to celebrate and support the young people, teachers, and schools across our county who are working to protect and enhance our local environment.

Running across the full 2025-2026 academic year, the awards aim to spotlight positive action, creative thinking, and a love for the Norfolk countryside, whether that's through hands-on sustainability projects, student-led campaigns, or thoughtful engagement with nature both in and out of the classroom.

There are two entry categories:

- **Showcase Your Own Project:** For schools already involved in green or environmental work
- **Take Part in a CPRE Norfolk Challenge:** A guided activity inspired by our charity's work to protect the countryside

We know that many Norfolk schools are already doing wonderful things, from planting trees and growing vegetables to campaigning for cleaner air or creating nature murals. This award scheme is our way of saying: we see you, and we want to celebrate you.



Photo by Ben Thomas

As well as recognition and celebration, the winning schools will receive a meaningful prize, designed to connect students with the natural world in a fun, hands-on and inspiring way.

How to get involved

A full Teacher Resource Pack, entry form and all key dates can be found on our website at:

www.cprenorfolk.org.uk/youth-awards

If you're a teacher, parent, school governor or part of a local group, please do share this with any Norfolk school you think might like to take part.

“Young people are the future of the countryside. This is about encouraging them to love it, protect it, and lead the way.”

~ Lisa-Marie Ashbury, Trustee, CPRE Norfolk

New Towns, Old Mistakes? Continued from page 3

It would make sense to introduce a planning law change that would revoke and redraft all local plans in affected areas. In February, the government said they would announce a shortlist of new town sites in late summer, picked from a random set of over 100 sites put forward. We wait with bated breath.

So, in conclusion, 'No to New Towns', unless they fit the above model and we effectively use the land already in the local plans, putting a stop to double counting via further unnecessary land allocations.

We need a different approach to housing, leaving market housing to the private developers within a strategic planning approach and with tough building regulations to ensure houses are fit for purpose and well constructed. We should leave the social housing to the proven 'council housing' model which addresses where the crisis lies, under the banner of national infrastructure, built in the right places and ensuring quality homes for all.

Seasonal Spectacles

By Lisa Ashbury

Winter transforms Norfolk into a serene and magical landscape, offering a quieter, more reflective time to explore its countryside. As the vibrant hues of summer and autumn give way to frost-kissed fields and tranquil skies, Norfolk's seasonal spectacles remain captivating. Here's an in-depth look at the hidden gems and unique experiences that make winter in Norfolk so special.

Wildlife in Winter, Nature's Quiet Drama

Norfolk's wildlife doesn't take a break in winter, in fact, it offers some of the most fascinating spectacles of the year.

- Seal Spotting at Blakeney Point

Winter marks the peak of grey seal pupping season along Norfolk's coast. At Blakeney Point, home to one of the UK's largest grey seal colonies, you'll find adorable pups dotting the beaches. Guided boat tours allow you to witness these incredible animals while respecting their space.

- Winter Birdlife on the [Norfolk Broads](#)

The Norfolk Broads come alive with migratory birds in winter. Look out for Bewick's and whooper swans, along with vast flocks of wigeon and teal. [Hickling Broad](#) and [RSPB Strumpshaw Fen](#) are perfect spots for birdwatching. Bring binoculars and visit early in the morning for the best chance to see flocks in action.

Winter Walks, Quiet Trails and Frosty Beauty

Norfolk's trails take on an enchanting quality in winter, with frosty reedbeds, shimmering waterways, and the crunch of frozen leaves underfoot.

- The Broads' Winter Trails

Quiet paths through places like [How Hill](#) and [Barton Broad](#) provide peaceful escapes.

Frost on the reeds and muted winter light create a magical atmosphere that feels almost otherworldly.

- The Brecks and Thetford Forest

Winter in [Thetford Forest](#) offers scenic, accessible trails through ancient pine trees dusted with frost. It's also a great time to spot wildlife, such as deer and flocks of redwings and fieldfares.

- Coastal Walks Without the Crowds

Explore stretches of the [Norfolk Coast Path](#) in winter, from [Holkham](#) to Brancaster. The beaches are quieter, the light softer, and the air fresh with the tang of the sea.

Stargazing Under Norfolk's Dark Skies

Winter skies offer some of the clearest conditions for stargazing, making Norfolk's dark sky locations a must-visit for night explorers.

- Constellations to Spot

Orion the Hunter dominates the winter night sky, while Sirius, the brightest star, sparkles low on the horizon. The Pleiades cluster, also known as the Seven Sisters, is another seasonal highlight. Did You Know? Norfolk's rural locations, such as [Kelling Heath](#), are recognised as some of the best stargazing spots in the UK.

- Astronomy Events

Check out local stargazing groups or observatories for winter star parties or guided nights under the stars. These events often provide telescopes and expert guidance for beginners.

How CPRE Norfolk Protects Our Winter Landscapes

Winter's unique beauty reminds us why conservation is so vital. From ensuring migratory birds have protected habitats to campaigning for the preservation of dark sky areas, CPRE Norfolk plays a key role in safeguarding the county's natural wonders. Every frost-covered field and winter roost is a testament to the importance of our work, and the support of our members.



A Creative Day at Martha's Meadow

By Lisa Ashbury

Nestled on the edge of Southery in West Norfolk, Martha's Meadow is a hidden pocket of countryside quietly transformed by one man's vision. Over the years, a local resident has rewilded this land with care and dedication, creating wildlife ponds, planting hedgerows, and building homes for insects, birds, and amphibians.

This beautiful space is not owned by CPRE Norfolk. It has been generously made available to us, free of charge, by its landowner, someone who shares our belief that the countryside is something to be loved, respected, and shared.

On Sunday 25th May, we were honoured to host a special event here: A Creative Day at Martha's Meadow. Visitors enjoyed guided countryside walks, photography and art competitions, nature-themed activities, and plenty of homemade refreshments, all set against the peaceful backdrop of meadows, birdsong, and wide Norfolk skies. It was a day to slow down, connect, and celebrate nature in community.

Our Meadow Day competitions brought out some truly inspiring entries, from peaceful pond scenes to bold sketches of butterflies and blooms.

Visitors of all ages captured the spirit of the day through photography and art, and we were thrilled to showcase the winning pieces during the event. Thank you to everyone who took part. Your creativity reminded us just how deeply people connect with Norfolk's countryside.

We're incredibly grateful to the landowner for his trust and generosity in offering us this space. His quiet dedication over the years has allowed nature to flourish and created a perfect example of what can be achieved when local people take the lead in protecting the countryside.

"It felt like stepping into another world – peaceful, beautiful, and alive with nature."

~ Lisa-Marie Ashbury, Trustee, CPRE Norfolk

If you'd like to get involved in future events like this, or know of a space with similar potential, we'd love to hear from you.



Save the Date – Martha's Meadow Returns!

Following the wonderful success of our first event, we're delighted to announce that Martha's Meadow will return on Sunday 7th June 2026.

This celebration of creativity, countryside and community will bring together local stallholders, refreshments, art and nature activities, and the chance to explore one of Norfolk's most inspiring rewilded spaces. Whether you came last time or are planning your first visit, expect a day filled with wildflower walks, handmade crafts, creative workshops, delicious local produce, and the quiet magic that makes Martha's Meadow so special.

More details to follow – but for now, pop the date in your diary, drop us a line if you'd like to host a stall and importantly, don't forget to tell a friend!

Celebrating Music, Community & Leadership

What a night to remember! On 10 May 2025, the glorious St Peter Mancroft Church in Norwich reverberated with chorus and cheer during our special AGM event, “Loud sing cuckoo: songs for the month of May.” It was an uplifting evening of choral music, heartfelt farewells, and inspiring fellowship—all in support of CPRE Norfolk’s continuing work.

A Concert to Remember

The celebrated Norfolk choir Sine Nomine took centre stage, lifting spirits with a varied programme that wove together classical choral gems and cherished folk songs. Their stirring harmonies took us on a journey through the essence of spring—sacred and secular, joyful and reflective. We are truly thankful to all the members of the choir who voluntarily gave up their time to support CPRE Norfolk. Every note had a purpose with all proceeds from the concert directly supporting CPRE Norfolk’s vital campaigns and initiatives across the county, the powers of harmony turning into real-world impact.

Reflecting on Our Year

After the concert, we welcomed members and guests to our 53rd Annual General Meeting. Our Chairman’s and Treasurer’s Reports, along with the 2024 accounts, are all



included in the [2024 Trustees’ Annual Report](#) available online for anyone wishing to explore our latest milestones and learnings.

A Fond Farewell

A moving moment followed the AGM, as members joined together with staff and volunteers to extend our deepest thanks to retiring Chair Chris Dady. His many years of dedicated service were celebrated with a presentation by trustee and treasurer George Ridgway, and incoming Chair, Elliot Nelson. It was a touching tribute to a leader who’s played a pivotal role in our shared journey and protecting Norfolk’s countryside.



So, with gratitude in our hearts and a melody in our memories, we thank you—our members—most sincerely. Whether you joined us that night or supported in spirit, you’re the reason our countryside thrives.

Support CPRE Norfolk Every Time You Shop – At No Extra Cost!

We’re now registered with Easyfundraising — a free, simple way to turn your everyday online shopping into donations for CPRE Norfolk. Over 7,500 retailers (including supermarkets, travel, fashion, insurance, and utilities) will give us a small donation whenever you shop via their site.

“I am proud to support CPRE Norfolk whenever I shop. I love seeing my donations total go up when I’m buying my weekly shop or gifts for my family — even down to my car insurance.” – Lisa Ashbury

How to get started:

1. Visit www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/cpre-norfolk
2. Click Sign up and support this cause
3. Add the reminder tool or app to make it automatic

It’s free, effortless, and every pound helps protect Norfolk’s countryside.

A Distinguished Voice for Norfolk — Introducing Our New President



In August we were delighted to announce that Sir Nicholas Bacon Bt OBE DL had graciously accepted the role of President of CPRE Norfolk.

A Norfolk Champion

Sir Nicholas' numerous roles include:

- Chair of The Queen's Green Canopy, a nationwide tree-planting initiative
- Chair of The Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth, The Plant Health Alliance, and the Trustees of The Royal Collection
- Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Foresters
- Active local leader through roles with Norwich Cathedral, Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association, Easton College, University of East Anglia, and Norfolk PACT

He has also served as President of the RHS (2013–2020), High Sheriff of Norfolk (2005), and Lord Warden of the Stannaries for the Duchy of Cornwall (2006–2022).

Sir Nicholas reflects:

"I am honoured to serve as President of CPRE Norfolk at such a crucial time for our countryside. I look forward to

working with communities across the county to protect our landscapes, champion sustainable farming, and ensure that future generations can experience the beauty and biodiversity of Norfolk."

A Warm Welcome

Our Chair, Elliot Nelson, shares:

"We are thrilled to have Sir Nicholas join us as President. His outstanding leadership across national and local organisations, and his lifelong dedication to Norfolk, make him an inspiring figurehead for our charity. His guidance will be invaluable as we continue to campaign for the protection of Norfolk's unique rural character."

Please join us in welcoming Sir Nicholas Bacon — an environmental steward and community leader whose presidency marks a new chapter for CPRE Norfolk. Together, we can ensure that Norfolk's natural beauty continues to thrive—today and for years to come.

We are also pleased to announce that Sir Nicholas will be the keynote speaker at our 2026 annual general meeting to be held on Tuesday, 5th May.



Join in:
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