

Question and Answers from Birch Solar Farm Parish Council Meetings

Dates: 5th April 2022 – Birch Parish Council
12th April 2022 – Copford with Easthorpe Parish Council

Location: In-person meeting

This document has been produced to provide all parish councils with a written account of the questions and answers which were provided at the two parish council meetings held on the 5th and 12th of April, respectively.

If you have any further questions about the below list, please feel free to get in contact with a member of the team via our project email. info@birchsolarfarm.co.uk

What is the size of the HGV trucks?

We cannot be precise in terms of vehicle loading (tonnage) but generally speaking HGVs are typically categorised with a plated weight of 3.5 tonnes or more. The HGVs will **not** be an abnormal load during construction and will **not** exceed 16.5m in length and 2.5m in width.

What percentage of brownfields do we use?

We have not developed on any brownfield sites. Brownfields are always considered, however unfortunately they do not always coincide with available grid capacity/ connection. Another difficulty is that brownfield sites are generally not of the necessary scale to be able to host a large-scale solar scheme. Frequently located in urban areas, brownfield sites are often held for higher land value uses such as housing or commercial development and are therefore often not able to be made available to the energy industry.

With this being said, the closest to a brownfield site that we have developed is on a disused airfield, named B-17 Solar Project. It is worth mentioning that it is a common misconception that once a solar farm is decommissioned, the agricultural land is turned into 'brownfields'. However, this is not the case. The land classification will not change during the life span of the solar project.

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Why was this piece of land and what survey was involved to choose this piece of land?

We engaged with a landscape consultant to review the whole of the Birch Estate to see which area had the least impact. The environmental consultant advised us this selected site had the least harm overall. As part of our planning application, an alternative site assessment will be completed, which will be available further through the process.

How many batteries and what is the location?

There will be approximately 16 containers holding the batteries and they will be located away from residential homes, towards the centre of the site. However, this is an indicative amount because we are still early on in the planning process and ultimately, these details will be finalised later on in the detailed design stage. Presently, the consultation layout is still being designed, however, we will be able to display our indicative layout during our public consultation.

What do our solar farms look like 10 years on?

Below, I have attached a couple of examples of one of our solar sites, named Lackford Estate Solar Park, built in March 2014.

Solar technology has improved since 2014, so these photos do not give an accurate depiction of up-to-date technology, however, what can be exemplified is that the grass continues to grow underneath and between the panels.



What is the lifespan of solar panels?

Our development is proposed on a temporary basis, which is a 40-year period. Solar and battery technologies have hugely advanced in the last 5 years and are continuing to rapidly develop. In theory, the panels and batteries should last the lifetime of the project. However, as technologies rapidly improve, it might be the case whereby it is more efficient to update the technologies than to keep the existing ones.

What is the cable route?

The electricity generated by the solar panels is proposed to connect into the local electricity distribution network at Abberton Substation via an underground cable. The route of the cable will pass through farmland crossing the B1022, Maldon Road and Orpen's Hill through Layer de la Haye and into the Substation on Abberton Road. During our public consultation, we will be able to display a cable route map.

What level of disruption will be incurred to the road?

This level of detail does not get decided until post-determination in the detailed design stage (if planning permission is received), so we are unable to provide information on this at consultation. However, a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) will be agreed with the Local Highways Authority ahead of any construction.

Can we give cheaper energy to locals?

Unfortunately, we are not an energy supplier so we cannot sell energy directly to local people. There is work going on at industry level to move towards regionally based energy pricing - whereby areas close to wind farms and solar farms could be charged lower rates when those generators are producing power. So, in the medium term there is scope for prices to be lower than the average in areas closer to renewable energy projects.

Is the Public Right of Way (PRoW) still usable?

We would look to keep the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) which run west to east along and within our site boundary kept open throughout construction and operation of the solar farm.

If possible and to maintain the enjoyment of these paths we look to include buffers of meadow or wildflower planting and a thick hedgerow to help screen direct views of the solar farm.

What support will there be for the bees?

We encourage the siting of beehives within the solar farm and would engage with a trained local beekeeper to ensure the health and welfare of the bees. Ensuring food for bees will be considered as part of our planting plan.

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