

Withersfield Parish Council:

Comments on the proposed EIA Scoping Application for Kingsway Solar Farm - EN010165

Withersfield Parish is the most south and west parish in Suffolk and borders the areas where the proposal would be located.

The Parish Council believes that a development of the size and scale of this proposal has the potential to have significant impact on our parish and the lives and well-being of our residents.

We fully support the move to green renewable energy and appreciate the positive contribution that solar farms can and are having in making the switch from damaging fossil fuel generation.

That said, the Parish Council believes that this should be seen as a green light to all and every development, no matter what size and impact on local communities. We believe that the principles of community engagement and full and meaningful consultation should not be sacrificed.

We have set out below a number of questions which we believe should be answered by the applicant prior to any decision being made to permit this development.

We are grateful to the Planning Inspectorate for identifying the Parish Council as a formal consultee. However, we wonder why the neighbouring planning authorities – West Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council have not been included in your list of consultees. This development would have implications for both the Local Plan and the County Council's strategic infrastructure plans.

1. Environmental Impact and Biodiversity

We have concerns regarding the impact on local ecosystems, biodiversity, and agricultural land. The project could disrupt wildlife habitats, including protected species like hares and skylarks, and compromise movement of larger mammals due to security fencing. A comprehensive ecological assessment, along with long-term monitoring and habitat management plans, is essential to mitigate these risks and protect local wildlife corridors.

Key Questions:

1. Has a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) been conducted?
2. What measures will be required to be put in place to protect local wildlife?
3. How will biodiversity be monitored and managed over time?
4. Will wildlife corridors be established?
5. How will construction-phase impacts on biodiversity be minimised?

2. Proximity to Residential Areas

We worry that the location of battery storage systems could have a negative impact on residential properties and of the rural environment more generally. We are concerned that there could be significant landscape alterations, noise pollution from BESS, construction disruptions, and potential impacts on property values, which may affect residents' well-being and the appeal of surrounding areas.

Key Questions:

1. What is the minimum distance to the nearest residence?
2. Has a noise impact assessment been conducted?
3. Will there be anti-glare measures for solar panels?
4. How will construction noise be managed?
5. Will visual screening be implemented around residential areas?

3. Agricultural and Land Use Concerns

We are concerned at the loss of productive agricultural land with a consequential impact on our rural economies, rural employment as well as the potential impact on food security. We understand solar farms can degrade the land, making it less suitable for future agricultural use.

Key Questions:

1. Was the land's agricultural value considered in site selection?
2. How will soil health be monitored during the project?
3. Will land restoration be ensured post-decommissioning?
4. Will there be a commitment to preserve agricultural land post-use?

4. Community Consultation and Engagement

Effective community consultation is crucial for large-scale solar farms. We believe this should not be superficial and conducted only to fulfil legal requirements. We feel that fostering positive relationships with the community can ensure that negative impacts are mitigated and positive benefits for the community and the environment can result.

Key Questions:

1. How will community feedback be incorporated?
2. Is the consultation process designed to be more than a formality?
3. Will there be additional rounds of consultation throughout the project?
4. How will residents and neighbouring communities such as Withersfield be kept informed?

5. Flood Risk and Water Management

We fear large-scale solar farms could negatively impact on drainage patterns and increase flood risk due to increased surface runoff. Given existing flooding issues within the vicinity,

including in local rivers and water courses in Withersfield, it is essential that effective measures are in place to safeguard water resources and prevent further environmental impact.

Key Questions:

1. How will water runoff be managed?
2. What flood risk assessments have been conducted?
3. Has the impact on local rivers and water courses been assessed?
4. What provisions are in place for water management?

6. Long-Term Viability and Maintenance

We would expect solar farms to require ongoing maintenance and management, leading to increased traffic in the area. This can impact local roads, particularly narrow and single-track lanes. Adequate road infrastructure is essential to support both construction and operational activities, including access for emergency services.

Key Questions:

1. Will a traffic management plan be required for both the construction period and to cover the long-term management and maintenance of the site?
2. What is the operational lifespan of the solar farm?
3. How will site access and traffic be managed?
4. Are financial provisions for site restoration in place?
5. Are legal protections for site restoration in place?

7. Economic and Regional Impact

Large-scale solar projects can offer economic benefits but also present challenges for local communities. The future use of the land after decommissioning remains uncertain, raising concerns about its long-term impact on the local economy and community character.

Key Questions:

1. What job opportunities will be created locally?
2. How will potential agricultural job losses be mitigated?
3. Are there measures to protect property values?
4. Will there be community investment options?
5. What reinvestments are planned for the local economy?

8. Loss of Amenity

We are concerned about the impact on local footpaths and the visual character of the landscape. Footpaths, protected by law, are essential for recreation and well-being.

Key Questions:

1. How will public footpaths be impacted?
2. Will all paths remain legally accessible?
3. Are there plans to enhance recreational spaces?
4. Is there scope to improve and/or extend public footpaths and cycleways?
5. How will visual impacts along footpaths be minimised?
6. Will green infrastructure be developed to support public access?

9. Disruption During Construction

The construction of the solar farm will involve significant traffic and noise disruption for local and neighbouring communities. Heavy construction vehicles will increase traffic on local roads, potentially causing congestion and road damage. Construction noise and light pollution may also impact residents' quality of life. Additionally, the construction phase could disrupt wildlife habitats, affecting sensitive species.

Key Questions:

1. What is the expected construction duration?
2. How will noise and light pollution be managed?
3. Will any local roads be temporarily closed?
4. Are there measures to manage construction traffic?
5. How will road damage from heavy vehicles be addressed?

10. Battery Storage and Technical Infrastructure

The project includes significant hard infrastructure in the form of the battery storage systems (BESS). We fear that these systems could bring additional risks to the environment and to local amenity.

Key Questions:

1. Where will BESS containers be located?
2. How will fire risks be managed?
3. Have local fire services been consulted?
4. What noise mitigation measures are planned?
5. Will lighting for BESS installations be minimised?

11. Benefits to Community

The Kingsway solar farm project will have long-term impacts on the local community. We believe that if the development proceeds there should be tangible benefits for local and neighbouring communities and are interested in proposals for community benefit fund linked to project income. This could ensure that future generations benefit. Additionally, the project could include measures to mitigate flooding risks, improve local infrastructure, and enhance public access to the surrounding landscape.

Key Questions:

1. Will a community fund be established for local improvements?
2. Will discounted energy benefits be offered to residents?
3. Are infrastructure improvements planned for flood mitigation?
4. Could funds be used to tackle long standing local infrastructure issues - for example east-west transport links between West Suffolk (Haverhill and beyond) and Cambridge?

Withersfield Parish Council

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