

# WESTON COLVILLE PARISH COUNCIL

Chair of Weston Colville Parish Council

10th / December / 2024

## Weston Colville Parish Council's consultation feedback to Kingsway Solar Ltd

### 1. Our view of the proposal

Weston Colville Parish Council strongly objects to the solar farm and battery storage proposal as presented by Downing Renewable Developments (DRD) in October 2024. One of our primary objections is the significant increase in the flood risk to the village. Secondly, it has a highly visible adverse impacts on the landscape and the heritage of Weston Colville. Thirdly it has potential to seriously damage protected species. There should be no justification for a solar farm of this scale being located so close to our rural village community as shown in area C, this is totally unacceptable. We also object to valuable agricultural land being lost with its associated reduction in food production to a large-scale energy project noting there is no national policy for land-use currently in place.

### 2. Design Input

The following suggestions from Weston Colville Parish Council (WCPC) for improvements to the design are not prejudicial to our view on the proposed solar farm, as outlined above.

#### 2.1 Flood Risk

- 2.1 Mitigation must be put in place by DRD to prevent any worsening, and preferably reduce the flooding that occurs regularly along Common Road, Chapel Road, Horseshoe Lane and at Church End. There is a significant likelihood that the increase water run off due to a large solar farm in the fields in area C will increase the likelihood of 16+ houses being flooded in the village. This has happened before and would become highly probable if the Solar farm is constructed by DRD as the fields of area C slope down towards the village.

#### 2.2 Preservation of wildlife and habitat

- 2.2.1 The proposal must include a comprehensive independent ecological assessment of the effect of the solar farm on the wildlife and biodiversity around Weston Colville. This must be completed before the examination stage of the NSIP and made available to the public as soon as possible and definitely before the statutory consultation.

2.2.2. During the construction of the solar farm and continuously thereafter the ecology of the solar farm must be monitored by independent experts appointed by the local authority to confirm that all commitments in the development consent order (DCO) are complied with. This must happen throughout the year to ensure that the full seasonal change is covered, and the costs of this monitoring will be borne by DRD, as specified by legislation.

2.2.3. if any long-term deleterious impact on wildlife populations and habitat is identified they must be dealt with by DRD, including if required the removal and redesigning parts of the solar farm.

2.2.4 The construction of the solar farm by DRD must be done so that it minimises disruption to wildlife e.g. construction activities must be scheduled outside of sensitive breeding or nesting seasons to avoid disrupting critical life stages for wildlife species.

2.2.5 Hedges, trees and other habitats for wildlife (ditches, scrub, ponds, streams) must be minimally disturbed during construction. They must not be moved by DRD as planting replacements elsewhere is unsatisfactory. This is especially true for the many significant old hedgerows that would be protected under usual planning applications.

2.2.6.1 Security fencing must have a gap (15-20 cm) between the base of the fences and the ground to allow small wildlife to pass through.

2.2.6.2 DRD must fit security fencing in the solar farm with tunnels so that the movement of badgers is not impeded.

2.2.6.3 DRD must fit security fencing in the solar farm with suitable wildlife access gates to allow the movement of wildlife around the solar farm boundaries, especially the large herds of deer in this location.

2.2.7 Items such as nest boxes, hibernacula and log piles should be installed by DRD in areas specified by the monitoring ecologist.

2.2.8 The solar panels must be situated away from sensitive aquatic invertebrate populations.

2.2.8 The solar farm should use panels that have low and preferably non-polarized reflections (e.g., using low-reflectance cells, optical coatings, structured surfaces) to reduce the effect on aquatic invertebrate and the risk of collisions by flying wildlife.

2.2.9 DRD must design the solar farm to maintain movement corridors and connectivity pathways that allow for the movement of species between fragmented habitats.

2.2.10 Setback distances and exclusion zones must be implemented by DRD to protect sensitive habitats and breeding sites of priority species, of which there are several including Barn Owls, Red Kites and Yellow Hammers

## 2.3 Preservation of landscape and visual amenity

People who live Weston Colville must still feel like being in the countryside, not a power station. The following requirements aim to preserve Weston Colville's rural character and our quality of life.

2.3.1 There must be a significant buffer zone between all habitation and village amenities, including the Church, and the infrastructure of the solar farm. This includes solar panels, buildings, power cables, and fencing. We suggest the use of land contours landscaping and

natural vegetation be used by DRD as a natural screen. This must ensure that none of the infrastructure is obviously visible from the central village envelope.

2.3.2 Security fencing and the solar farm infrastructure- including cables- must be set back from and not visible from any footpaths in the network that surrounds the village and cross the solar farm. The security fencing must also be screened by natural contours, landscaping, hedgerows or trees so that being on the footpaths still feels like being in the countryside and not a solar power station. All the paths which cross area C are regularly used by residents of Weston Colville and visitors so they do not need to be individually identified but their character must be preserved.

2.3.3 Cables within the solar farm should be run underground by DRD rather than be on telegraph-like posts so they too are not visible from the central village envelope or footpaths.

## 2.4 Preservation of heritage and village character

2.4.1 It is vitally important that the woodland cemetery that is just outside the published envelope of the development is completely unaffected by the solar farm, both visually and in terms of noise. There must be no change to the experience of being there.

2.2.3 The solar farm infrastructure must not be visible from St Mary's Church grounds and graveyard.

## 2.4 Health and Safety

2.4.1 We strongly oppose the use of Weston Colville roads many of which are single track for any large vehicle being used for DRD construction traffic. An acceptable traffic management plan must be agreed with the local authority and the affected parish councils and made available to the public before the statutory consultation. This must detail proposed access routes for construction vehicles, and the expected volume of construction traffic. It must address ways to mitigate against the impact of daily commuting by many construction workers, and the impact of many heavy vehicle movements each day (estimated at >500).

2.4.2 Construction traffic must not be allowed by DRD to use the roads around Weston Colville during the morning and evening rush hours (times to be agreed in the traffic management plan), and when the schools are starting and ending.

2.4.3 After any construction of the Kingsway solar farm, all roads used by DRD related traffic must be repaired at the expense of DRD.

2.4.4 If higher than usual levels of solar farm related traffic persist after construction of the solar farm, then ongoing monitoring of the road quality and their rapid repair must continue.

2.4.5 Due to our valid concerns about the safety of lithium batteries, these should be excluded by DRD from any battery energy storage system (BESS) used for the Kingsway solar farm proposal.

2.4.6 Any BESS used by the Kingsway solar farm they must be sited by DRD at least 2 km from any habitation in line with current recommendations. It is not safe to live near lithium battery units because of the substantial risk from them catching fire (low likelihood, very high impact) causing the release of dangerous chemicals into the air.

2.4.7 All BESS must be designed with considerable mitigation measures to prevent- in the event of a fire run off of contaminated water into the chalk aquifer. The chalk aquifer is vulnerable to pollution and contamination would seriously affect the entire Cambridge area.

### 3 Compensation

This section asks for methods of compensation to the residents of West Wrating for the considerable adverse impact of the solar form on their quality of life and the value of their property as has been widely demonstrated and is already affecting house prices in the village.

3.1 Individual households of Weston Colville should have their cost of electricity reduced. Discussions are currently taking place between the solar industry and UK Government to enable this type of compensation, which is supported by Octopus Energy<sup>8</sup>. If Kingsway Solar Farm is approved by the secretary of state, a mechanism to deliver reduced electricity prices must have been put in place so that individual households in Weston Colville immediately start to receive compensation.

3.2 A repeating community grant (e.g., annual) like that available from Wadlow wind farm, which is locally managed and incorporates more inclusive eligibility criteria should be set up by DRD.

3.3 DRD should set up a grant scheme to assist individual homes and businesses in West Wrating to purchase other green infrastructure, such as electric vehicle (EV) charging points, air source heat pumps, reduced price solar panels etc.

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