



The countryside charity  
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Working locally and nationally to  
promote, protect and enhance a  
beautiful and thriving countryside  
for everyone's benefit.

## Anti-Mega Solar Alliance

### Newsletter 1: January 2025

#### Alliance launch

CPRE Norfolk is a keen supporter of renewables done well. As far as solar-generated power is concerned, this primarily should mean rooftop solar, not least because research in 2023 by the UCL Energy Institute for CPRE demonstrated that the amount of solar energy (85 GW) needed to meet the UK's 2050 net zero commitment can be entirely produced by solar infrastructure on rooftops and other artificial surfaces including car parks. We are campaigning for all new buildings to have rooftop solar and for the retro fitting of solar panels on existing roof space, where appropriate, especially large warehouses and factories. This would lead to a massive reduction in the current unnecessary pressures on our countryside from mega-solar projects – schemes that would industrialise our landscape and rob us of valuable farmland for up to 60 years.

Due to recent moves for unnecessary mega-solar projects in Norfolk, CPRE Norfolk has launched its Alliance against such schemes. At the time of writing (late December 2024) three such projects are likely to become live applications in 2025: High Grove and The Drovers near Swaffham, and East Pye in South Norfolk close to Hempnall and several other villages. It also appears likely that further schemes in South Norfolk will become public before long, as permissions have been sought for connection to the National Grid: one near Gissing, and another outside Long Stratton.

The Alliance is open to any organisation or individual, with a particular call to Parish and Town Councils to join. Membership is free: just send an email to [planning@cprenorfolk.org.uk](mailto:planning@cprenorfolk.org.uk) if you would like to join. Please forward this Newsletter to anyone who may be interested in the cause and the Alliance.

We are aware that other groups are forming with the same or similar aims, for example that being set up by George Freeman MP for Parish Councils in the Mid Norfolk constituency which would be affected by mega-solar projects and the 'Great Grid Upgrade'. CPRE Norfolk is in contact with George, along with other key movers and shakers in the county, including Kay Mason Billig, leader of Norfolk County Council.

The CPRE Norfolk Alliance is for those across the county who wish to oppose mega-solar projects. It aims to provide news and advice to members to help their understanding of, and how most effectively to oppose, these schemes.

#### South Norfolk Council supports CPRE's rooftop solar campaign

It's very encouraging to report that at their Council Meeting on 16 December 2024, a motion proposed by Cllr. Jim Webber (Lib. Dem.) was approved by the Council to do the following:

1. To publicly support the CPRE rooftop solar campaign.
2. That the Leader of the Council writes to the Prime Minister supporting the "rooftop revolution" and asks for planning guidance and building regulations to be strengthened as soon as possible.
3. That the Council's shareholder representative requests the Board of Big Sky [SNDC's housing company] to produce a report setting out the financial implications of fitting all new completions (where feasible) with solar panels from end 2025.



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4. That the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Growth reviews any further opportunities for increased solar power and renewable energy on new developments and refers matters to the Planning and Economic Growth Committee for consideration.

It is hoped that Alliance members and others will refer this to their own Local Authorities across the county, so that they will put forward similar motions for approval.

#### **The Sunshine Bill, or the 'New Homes (Solar Generation) Bill**

This parliamentary bill is a current private members' bill raised by Max Wilkinson (Liberal Democrat MP for Cheltenham.) if this becomes law it would ensure that all new homes have solar panels installed as standard. The Sunshine Bill will have its second reading on Friday 17 January 2025, meaning it has already been presented to parliament, with this being the first opportunity for debate. If successful at this stage, the bill would then enter a 'Committee Stage' where it is examined in more detail. During every stage of the bill's journey, it becomes more likely to be adopted as a law, bringing us closer to unleashing the full potential of rooftop solar in England.

Due to this being a Private Members' Bill, it does not have a set timetable for debate. MPs can speak for as long as they like on 17 January, meaning they can keep talking to ensure that time for debate runs out. The bill can only be voted on if MPs vote to end the debate and move to a vote – which requires not just a majority, but also at least 100 MPs to be present.

Alliance members can help the Sunshine Bill pass through Parliament, and therefore reduce the need for mega-solar, land hungry projects, by calling on your MP to attend the debate on Friday 17 January 2025.

#### **What is a mega-solar project?**

No formal definition exists for what constitutes a mega-solar project, but for the purposes of this Alliance CPRE Norfolk is using the term to cover any solar generating project which meets the threshold for it to be considered as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP.) If a project is accepted as a NSIP it will be determined (decided) by the relevant Secretary of State, who will consider the Examining Authority's (provided by the Planning Inspectorate) in coming to their decision. This is a very different system to that used for smaller solar projects and the majority of planning applications, which are determined by the relevant Local Planning Authority, which is usually at Borough, District or City level, or for larger projects but which do not meet the NSIP thresholds by the County Council.

Recent NSIPs in Norfolk include the onshore and offshore works for wind farms, the proposed Norwich to Tilbury (formerly East Anglia Green) and Grimsby to Walpole National Grid upgrades, the major upgrades to the A47, the Fens Reservoir Project, and the Medworth waste to energy Project.

Future Newsletters will take you through the NSIP process, step-by-step.

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