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CPRE's Position on Solar Energy

CPRE, the countryside charity is committed to supporting solar energy, but will always oppose harmful developments. This statement outlines our position, at a time when many local communities are facing inappropriate solar farm schemes.

Solar photovoltaics are an important part of our energy supply in the climate emergency, but the government has given the solar industry carte blanche to develop huge greenfield sites, which damage our countryside and ignore the huge potential of roof-mounted solar. It is hugely disappointing that the transition to net-zero carbon for the energy sector is being handled so poorly, and this cannot continue.

The climate and nature emergencies pose an existential threat to the countryside in terms of landscapes, livelihoods and the natural systems which support us all. CPRE is a passionate advocate for climate action, and we have clearly stated our support for renewable energy. If we are to eliminate our reliance on fossil fuels then no form of zero-carbon energy can be off the table. The government's Energy White Paper (2020)¹ committed the UK to generating 40 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind capacity by 2030; and the Climate Change Committee (2019)² recommended that 54GW of solar capacity is needed by 2035. But the need for energy does not justify damaging developments, and strong, effective planning policies are needed which enable schemes that minimise landscape impacts, secure real nature recovery opportunities, and enjoy the support of local communities. Schemes that fail to meet these expectations should be refused.

What's going wrong?

The location of choice for solar developments has become valuable farmland, ignoring the 250,000 hectares of south-facing commercial roof space (enough to meet half the UK's electricity demand)³ not to mention domestic roofs and surface car parks, that could be harnessed with little impact on landscape, tranquillity and cultural heritage.

By enabling greenfield solar and not prioritising roofs and brownfield land, the government is actively courting public opposition to solar energy, putting progress towards net-zero at risk.

Community-led energy schemes remain a poor relation to commercial schemes, while vast, industrial-scale solar farms are now being pursued through the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime, which sidesteps local democracy in planning and is notoriously difficult for local communities to engage with.

¹ [Energy white paper: Powering our net zero future - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/431211/energy-white-paper-2020.pdf)

² [Reducing UK emissions - 2019 Progress Report to Parliament - Climate Change Committee \(theccc.org.uk\)](https://www.theccc.org.uk/reports/2019/02/reducing-uk-emissions-2019-progress-report-to-parliament/)

³ [123160-NSC-Solar-Roofs-Good-Practice-Guide-WEB.pdf \(bre.co.uk\)](https://www.bre.co.uk/123160-NSC-Solar-Roofs-Good-Practice-Guide-WEB.pdf)



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What do we want to see?

CPRE is calling on the government to urgently take these strong, positive steps:

- A sequential policy, supported with investment incentives, should make commercial roofs and brownfield sites – and not greenfield sites - the clear locations of choice for solar energy;
- Reducing overall demand for energy through efficiency measures in buildings, industry and transport, should be a national priority – this is also crucial to tackling fuel poverty and creating green jobs;
- Individual and cumulative impacts on landscapes and farmland should carry substantial weight in all planning decisions;
- Greenfield solar applications must have a binding requirement to contribute to Local Nature Recovery Strategies;⁴
- Direct financial support should be given to community energy schemes, which represent the gold standard for renewables done well.

There is a pressing need for renewable energy, but that can never be a justification for poor quality or harmful schemes. Our local CPRE groups will always speak out against harmful proposals, and there is a desperate shortage of good schemes that would enjoy their support. The government must act quickly to fix this growing problem.

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⁴ [Local Nature Recovery Strategies: how to prepare and what to include - Defra - Citizen Space](#)