

Countryside charity welcomes Washford solar park refusal.

- On 18th July, Somerset Council's Area West committee unanimously refused permission for Washford Solar Park near Watchet
- This would have seen 14 fields covered with solar panels and surrounded by high security fencing for 40 years and threatened the livelihood of tenant farmers.
- CPRE [research](#) shows that rooftop solar could power the country to over half its solar energy targets, protecting land for nature, wildlife and homegrown food.

CPRE Somerset has a tricky job. As the countryside charity, its core purpose is to protect, enhance and celebrate our countryside but everything must also be looked at in the context of the climate emergency.

Every day CPRE volunteers look at major new planning applications for housing, economic use and energy generation and weigh up their pros and cons. Applications for solar farms are becoming more common and there are certainly solar farms in Somerset that are well designed and well placed in the landscape. There are those that provide significant community benefits. CPRE Somerset, along with over 100 objectors, recognised that the application for Washford Solar Park was not one of these.

The site sits prominently in the high-quality landscape of the beautiful River Washford Valley. It is within the landscape settings of the Exmoor National Park and the Quantocks AONB. It is also next to the entire length of one of the most popular public footpaths in the area – the 'Mineral Line'.

Significantly, surveys have shown that the land is classed as Best & Most Versatile. Government policy prohibits development on BMV land unless there are "compelling reasons".

Yesterday, in the face of strong opposition, including all local Parish Councils and Friends of Quantock, Exmoor National Park and the Quantock Hills AONB, Somerset Councillors unanimously refused this application. The refusal was on the grounds of landscape impact and loss of BMV land. The panel were also concerned about the long-term impact of the proposal and spoke of the need to have more solar on our roofs instead.

Hugh Williams, Chair of CPRE Somerset said:

"This is a great result and a huge relief for the local community who had to work so hard to fight against this proposal. The Committee clearly recognised that intrinsically beautiful landscape should be protected and that our best farmland should be used for growing food. It is time we started prioritising solar on every new build property in Somerset and making retrofitting more affordable to help tackle the climate crisis facing us all while protecting our green fields."

ENDS

About CPRE Somerset, the countryside charity

CPRE Somerset campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone's benefit, wherever they live. We have over 500 members across the county of Somerset and a team of committed volunteers. Our President is Mariella Frostrup.

www.cpresomerset.org.uk

Details of the application for Washford Solar Farm (application ref: 3/39/21/028) can be found on the Somerset Council planning pages [here](#)

CPRE's report on the potential for rooftop solar can be found [here](#)