

## **Tollgate Farm Solar: Frequently Asked Questions**

We are currently putting the finishing touches to our planning application for the Tollgate Farm Solar Farm, which will be submitted to and determined by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

We are grateful to local residents and stakeholders for the feedback already received and have had regard of this while finalising the planning application. The project team has put together the below FAQ document to address some of the most common questions and concerns to arise over the course of our pre-application engagement.

Should you have any further questions, we welcome additional feedback by email at [tollgate@brockwellenergy.co.uk](mailto:tollgate@brockwellenergy.co.uk), by post at FREEPOST – SEC NEWGATE LOCAL, or by filling in a feedback form or questionnaire on this website.

### **Q: What is being proposed, and where is it located?**

**A:** Brockwell Energy is preparing plans for a new 16-megawatt (16MW) solar development, to be located on fields to the east of the A1(M), between the towns of Welham Green and Hatfield, within the area of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

### **Q: Why is this development needed?**

**A:** There is an urgent global need for advanced economies to reduce their carbon emissions in the fight against climate change. Reducing the UK electricity system's reliance on imported fossil fuels is additionally a key aspect of the fight for energy security.

The Government has ambitious targets for solar energy development to as part of the move towards clean power by 2030. This will require all kinds of solar power to meet local and national targets – solar panels on homes and the rooftops of large buildings; large, 'nationally significant' projects determined by the Planning Inspectorate; and mid-sized solar farms located close to existing grid infrastructure.

If approved, the Tollgate Farm solar farm development will generate and store clean, renewable energy for export into the national electricity system – powering homes and businesses across the country. The development of new renewable energy sources is a key component of the fight against climate change and will help to ensure our energy independence at a time of significant international uncertainty.

### **Q: What stage of the planning process is the development at?**

**A:** We are currently preparing a planning application to submit to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. Over the past few weeks, we have undertaken pre-application engagement with local people and stakeholders.

This has included engagement with council officers, alongside correspondence with district councillors, local parish councils and officers from Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

We have been particularly keen to meet with local people to discuss the proposed application and held an in-person exhibition event in the North Mymms Memorial Hall on Wednesday 16 April to allow residents the chance to offer feedback and ask questions of the development team.

We intend to submit our planning application in the near future. It will then be subject to a consultation undertaken by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

We hope for the application to be determined in later in 2025.

**Q: Why was this site chosen to develop the solar development?**

**A:** The chosen site - on fields to the east of the A1(M) motorway – was chosen for a number of reasons in order to reduce the impact on local people and make the best use of the available land:

- Proximity to the grid: The proposed development will connect to the grid via an existing 33kV pylon located to the west of the site, reducing the need for an extensive cable route or a disruptive construction period.
- Distance from local residents: The proposed development is sited on fields between the towns of Hatfield and Welham Green. Bounded by the A1(M) to the west, it is also screened from view by mature vegetation around much of the perimeter and lies lower than much of the surrounding area.
- Access: An existing bridge over the motorway is being assessed for its suitability to act as a construction traffic access point. Use of this bridge, entering the site from the west, will mean that construction traffic can avoid driving through Welham Green or Hatfield, and also minimising any impact on Colney Heath to the west.

**Q: Who will operate the solar farm if approved? Does Brockwell intend to sell it once planning permission is granted?**

**A:** Brockwell Energy is proposing to secure planning permission, construct and operate the Tollgate Farm development for the entirety of its operational lifetime.

**Q: What is the timeline for planning, construction and operation of the solar farm?**

**A:** We are unable to be too precise at this point in time regarding the likely timeline.

Timescales for planning and construction are difficult to predict with accuracy this far in advance.

Nonetheless, as an indicative timeline, we are working towards the following milestones:

- Planning application submitted: Q2 2025
- Planning decision: Q4 2025
- Construction begins: Q2 2027
- Operation begins: Q2 2028

**Q: Why are you proposing this development within the Green Belt?**

**A:** We understand the need for any proposed development within the Metropolitan Green Belt to only proceed if there is strong justification, or ‘very special circumstances’ (VSC) as this justification is known within the planning system.

While we endeavour to avoid Green Belt sites wherever possible, the necessity of decarbonising the electricity system, as well as the limited number of available sites and grid connection points, means that in some cases siting developments within the Green Belt cannot be avoided.

As part of our forthcoming planning application, we will submit a VSC case to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, outlining the ways in which the benefits of the proposed development, including development of renewable energy and significant increases in biodiversity, outweigh any harms to the Green Belt.

**Q: How much high-quality agricultural land is going to be taken up by the proposed development?**

**A:** We have undertaken an agricultural land assessment as part of our preparations to submit our planning application. This assessment identified that the agricultural land component of the development site is graded 3a and 2.

While we design our schemes in order to avoid BMV land wherever possible, Brockwell Energy recognises this is not always achievable, and meeting the government’s clean energy ambitions means that some solar projects will need to come forward on BMV land in certain parts of the country.

Additionally, we are preparing an Agricultural Land Use Assessment to provide council officers with a detailed understanding of land quality beyond the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) grading structure. This assessment incorporates real data from the current farmers and occupiers to contextualise the land’s actual productivity in relation to national food production and alternative land uses.

**Q: How do you know that the development won’t have a negative impact on local people or the environment?**

**A:** As part of our pre-application work, we have commissioned a number of expert studies to identify any potential negative impacts of the proposed development and to consider potential mitigations which would offset these. No major negative impacts have been identified. In summary, these assessments included:

- Ecology
- Drainage
- Traffic & transport
- Archaeological & heritage
- Landscape & visual
- Glint & glare
- Arboriculture

The results of each of these assessments will be publicly available as part of the planning application.

**Q: What will the visual impact on local residents be?**

**A:** Our landscape & visual assessment concludes that the landscape and visual impact of the proposed development will be highly localised.

Combined with existing topography, vegetation, and proposed mitigation planting, the visual effects will be effectively screened and minimised.

**Q: How long will the construction programme last?**

**A:** The construction phase of the proposed development will last for 38 weeks. However, this does not mean that work will be taking place across the full site for the entire construction period.

**Q: Will there be negative impacts from construction traffic?**

**A:** Traffic movements will primarily be related to staff travel and will be scheduled outside of peak congestion periods. It is anticipated that the total number of deliveries requiring access to the site would be some 635 one-way trips (1,270 two-way trips) across the full 38-week construction period.

Vehicles carrying equipment and materials will access the site via the existing bridge over the A1(M) motorway. This will reduce the impact on local residents and keep these vehicles away from homes and businesses.

During the operational phase, traffic visits will be limited to occasional LGV maintenance access.

**Q: How will construction traffic access the site?**

**A:** We are preparing a Transport Statement (TS) to accompany the application, which outlines that construction traffic will access the site from the A1(M), minimising the impact on local homes & businesses.

Among the documents submitted as part of the application, a full Transport Statement (TS) and a detailed Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) will outline how the proposed development will deal with access, excavation and construction activity throughout all phases of the project life-cycle.

**Q: What impact will the development have on Public Rights of Way (PRoW) within and near the site?**

**A:** There are two existing public rights of way going through the site:

- An unrestricted byway running along the northern perimeter of the site which continues to the northern boundary of Bush Wood (North Mymms 028A)
- A restricted byway along the proposed access to the site over the motorway, and through Tollgate Farm (North Mymms 052)

We understand the importance of these routes to local people and have designed the scheme in such a way as to protect and enhance the PRoW network.

Retention of existing trees and hedges, and new planting along the byways will screen the visual impact of the solar arrays from people out walking – in addition to enhancing the site's biodiversity and preserving local mobility

While there would be some localised, temporary disruption to the PRow during the construction phase, local access to the PRow network will not be impacted during the operational phase.

**Q: What additional planting are you proposing to accompany the development?**

**A:** In addition to the operational components, the proposed development would also include extensive landscape planting. This includes neutral grassland or grazing pasture in the areas occupied by panels; and new species-diverse grassland, native hedgerow and native woodland planting along the boundaries of the site. The proposed planting would deliver significant ecological/biodiversity benefits and visually screen the development from roads and nearby homes.

**Q: Will the development have any benefits for biodiversity?**

**A:** The forthcoming planning application is supported by an ecological assessment and calculations of the Biodiversity Net Gain delivered by the scheme. The ecological assessment will identify existing habitats and / or species on the site and put forward appropriate mitigation to avoid / minimise harm to ecology and biodiversity.

At present the majority of the site is used for agricultural purposes. Typically, arable farmland such as that currently found on the site presents a very low ecological /biodiversity value.

Given this, the Proposed Development is expected to deliver significant ecological/biodiversity benefits by delivering large areas of species-diverse habitats, which hold a much higher ecological value. The new habitats compromise grassland, woodland and hedgerow, all of which would promote biodiversity.

**Q: I'm worried about the glint & glare from the solar panels, will this have an impact?**

**A:** Our glint & glare assessment concludes that the effects of glint and glare and their impact on local receptors would result in low or no impacts, and therefore no significant effects would occur.

**Q: Is there a risk of flooding affecting the site once developed?**

**A:** The development is designed to minimise the risk of flooding affecting equipment. The drainage report commissioned for the planning application has concluded that the site has no significant impact on flooding on or off-site. The drainage strategy supporting the application will ensure surface water is appropriately managed without affecting surrounding areas.

**Q: What benefits will there be for local people if this development gets approved?**

**A:** Brockwell Energy is committed to supporting local communities by establishing a Community Benefit Fund for the Tollgate Farm Solar project. The fund will be set up in line with industry guidelines, with a strong focus on early engagement with the community to ensure that local funds are allocated by local people.

Brockwell Energy has a proven track record of delivering meaningful community support throughout the lifespan of its projects. The North Kyle Trust was set up as part of the

North Kyle Wind Farm and provided significant amounts of community funding to drive regeneration and local investment.

We are keen to hear ideas from local people regarding the size, scope and governance of the fund, and we welcome feedback on the kinds of local projects, groups or initiatives which could benefit from it once established.