

Dear all,

I wanted to provide you with an important update on the Barkham Solar Farm project following recent developments.

As you know, when we last met, the project was on track for construction to begin in Spring 2026 and completion in April 2027. We have continued to work hard on all aspects of the scheme, including securing cost savings with our contractor and refining the business case.

However, just before Christmas, we received the outcome of national grid connection reforms led by the National Energy System Operator (NESO). These reforms were intended to prioritise “shovel-ready” renewable projects, and we had expected this to confirm our original connection dates. Unfortunately, the result has been the opposite.

Our project has been placed in Gate 2, Phase 2, meaning NESO currently forecasts that full, firm connection for Barkham Solar Farm may not be available until between 2031 and 2035. While our original non-firm connection date of April 2027 remains, there is now significant uncertainty about how much energy we would be able to export before firm connection is achieved. This is clearly incompatible with our current delivery programme, and it would not be prudent for the Council to enter into a multi-million-pound construction contract without certainty on grid access.

Please be assured that we are not standing still. We are:

- Lobbying at the highest level with NESO and SSE Networks to challenge this decision and seek reinstatement of our original dates.
- Working with the Greater South East Net Zero Hub and other councils to raise the implications of these reforms with government.
- Continuing technical discussions with SSE Networks and NESO to understand the rationale and explore options.

This remains a priority project for the Council, and we are committed to delivering it as soon as circumstances allow. We will keep you updated as soon as we have more clarity.

Thank you for your continued support and patience as we navigate these national changes. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,

David

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