WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

BARKHAM
ARBORFIELD
FINCHAMPSTEAD

BARKHAM SOLAR FARM

PROPOSALS - JANUARY 2021

Creating a greener borough

In 2019 Wokingham Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency and adopted a vision for a net carbon zero borough by 2030. The aim of this was to help address climate change and create a greener future for Wokingham and its residents for years to come.

A major part of this vision includes reducing carbon dioxide emissions across the borough and supporting schemes to generate local renewable energy.

In order to meet this ambition the Council's action plan identifies a need to build four new solar farms in the borough.

Each of these new solar farms would create enough green energy to power around 5,000-8,000 homes and businesses, as well as saving around 6,325 tonnes of CO2 a year when compared to traditional fossil fuels.

Following a review of sites the Council has identified an area of farm land sitting between Barkham, Finchampstead and Arborfield for the first of these exciting new solar farms.

We're keen to hear what people think of the plans and have prepared this leaflet to summarise the proposals for the new solar farm.

The proposed site

The identified site sits to the north and south of Barkham Ride and is made up of around 40 hectares of council owned farm land (High Barn Farm and part of Brook Farm).

This land would be used to install solar panels, some small equipment stores, and additional tree planting to help screen the panels from view.

At this stage the exact red line has not been set and will be established in the coming months through the planning process and conversations with the tenant farmer.

Key parts of the proposals

- Install solar panels on circa 40ha of farm land to the north and south of Barkham Ride.

- Extensive new tree and hedge planting and green buffer area to edges of site to reduce visual impact, especially for footways, neighbours and historic buildings

- Maintaining and improving public rights of way across the site

- Protecting and improving biodiversity of the site

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Area For Solar Farm

Indicative Red Line Boundary

Tree Planting Area
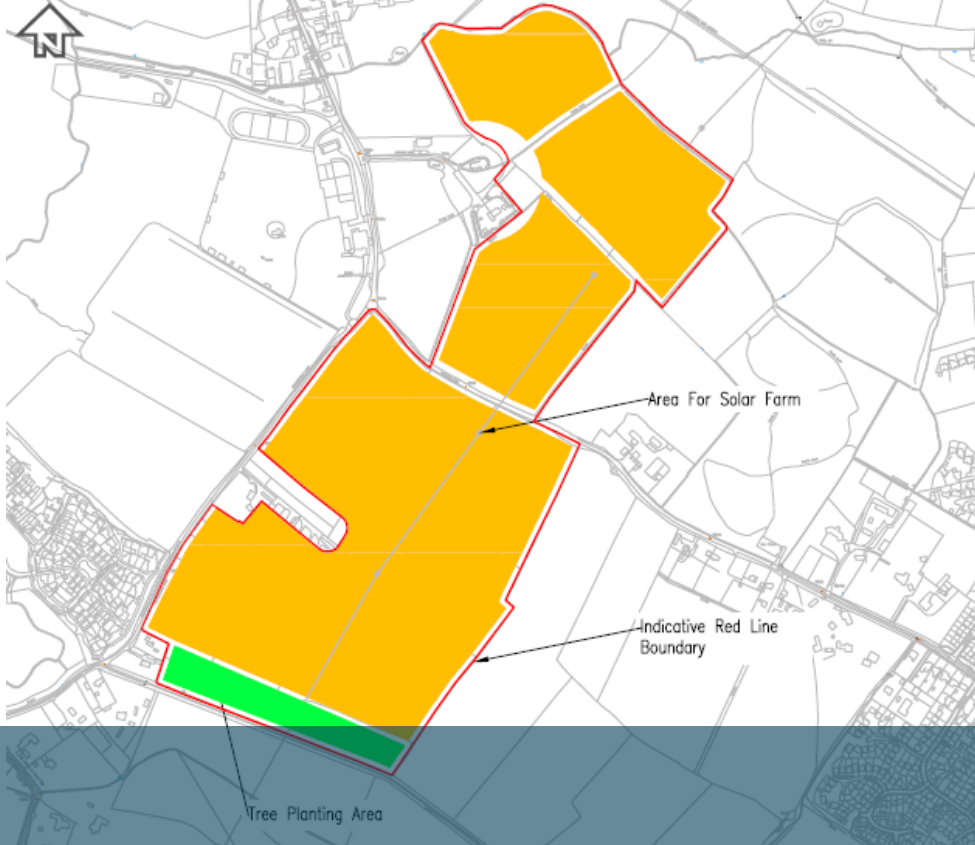
KEY INFORMATION

How does it work?

Solar panels would be mounted on poles in the ground and angled to best capture the light. Even on dull days the panels will still be able to generate lots of power.

Energy collected from the panels will be put back into the national grid. This will help generate local green renewable energy as well potentially providing income to fund the scheme and other council services.

Will the site be noisy or create congestion?

Modern Solar panels operate very quietly so should there should be little noise impact on local residents.

Any installation can be carried out quickly and with minimum disruption due to the design of the panels. Once installed the panels also require very minimum maintenance so won't generate many new vehicle movements around the area.

What about the public right of way?

At the moment there is a footpath which runs through the upper part of the proposed site.

The Council will ensure that this public right of way remains and is also considering options for a possible new footpath to the south of the site.

Will it impact on local views?

The proposal is to install the solar panels set back from the edges of the field to create an enhanced visual buffer and reduce their impact on the surrounding area.

The panel themselves also have a relatively low profile with the top edge being just over two meters from the ground level. They would also be staggered to make the most of the natural levels on the site.

In addition to this a large part of this site is already obscured from view by existing hedges and trees. This natural screening would be maintained and improved with new planting to help improve the effect.

During the process the Council will also be working closely with immediate neighbours to discuss any concerns or ideas. This will be especially important where properties are residential or have particular historic or local context.

Improved bio-diversity

It's important that the solar farm also minimises any impact on local wildlife so careful consideration will be given to how this can be done.

Any landscape plan will aim to improve bio-diversity in the area with careful choice of planting and the potential to introduce other initiatives to encourage wildlife.
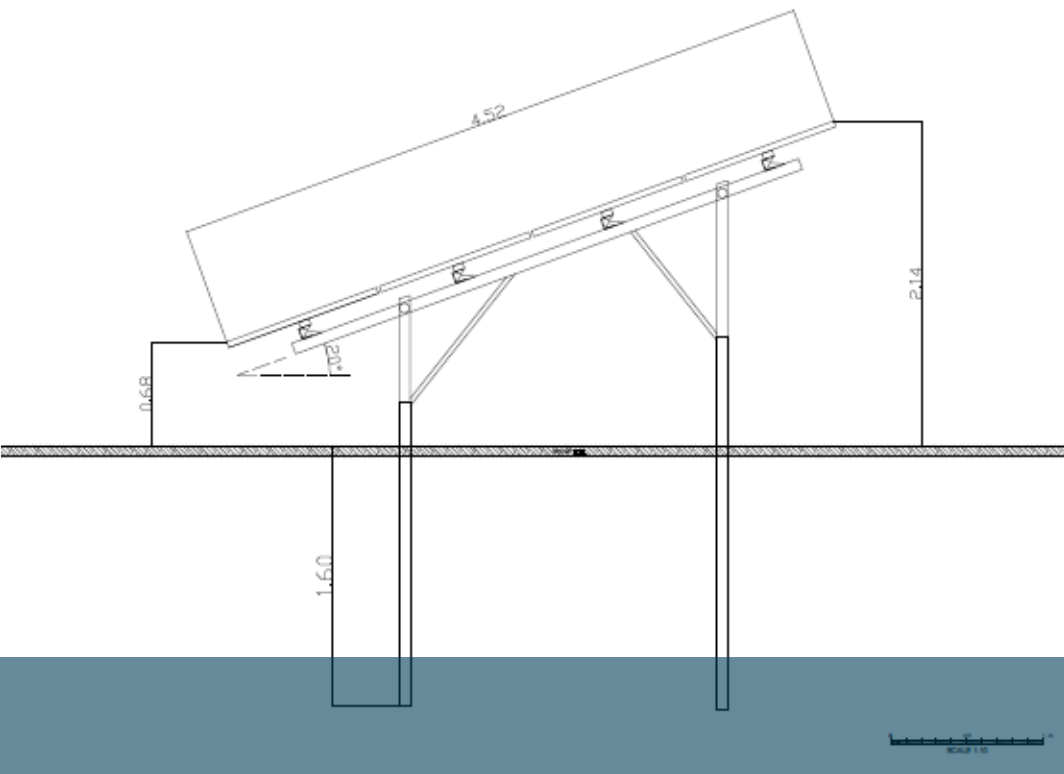
KEY INFORMATION

Will there be any buildings on site?

In order to run the solar farm and link up with the national grid there will be a small number of cabins required on site to house electrical equipment.

These small cabins would likely be prefabricated single storey units and will be carefully located to minimise impact on the surrounding area and neighbours

Applying for planning consent

In the next few months the Council plans to submit a temporary planning application for this site.

The application will be for a 40 year period based on the usual lifespan for a solar farm of this type.

Using it for solar panels will not change its status, or make future development more likely. At the end of this time the panels and cabins would be removed and the land would revert back to farmland again.

The planning application will seek to address feedback from local residents and will be accompanied by a range of studies, technical documentation and plans based on any final design for the site.

Should planning consent be granted the Council hopes to have the new solar farm operational by 2022.

Having your say

Before the planning application is submitted in the coming months the Council would like to hear what people think about these proposals to generate clean renewable energy in the local area.

You can send us your feedback at **CommercialProperty@wokingham.gov.uk**

Comments should be submitted by **Friday 26 February 2021** and will be used to help shape the final designs for the new solar farm.

You will also be able to submit your comments as part of the planning process once the planning application is submitted.

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https://cutt.ly/sjlvtD6

Or scan the QR Code on your smart phone

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