

# Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar Frequently Asked Questions

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## OVERVIEW

### How big is the proposed Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar development?

The solar panels would cover around 85 hectares within a 101 hectare area. The solar development has an expected generating capacity of up to 49.9 megawatts (MW). The site will also include a 10MW battery energy storage system (BESS) and will be connected to the National Grid via the existing 132kV overhead power line that crosses the eastern side of the site. This will mainly be underground, emerging onto a single pole adjacent to the existing power line.

The proposed site was identified following a four-step selection process that considered demand for electricity and suitability for the area. The proposals have been carefully considered to minimise any impact on the community and the environment. The site layout and the grid connection route have been designed, where possible, to protect public footpaths, local views and minimise disruption to the local community. As part of this, Ampyr Solar Europe is developing a landscaping strategy that includes enhancing and improving the network of hedgerows around and within the site.

### What will Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar consist of?

Key facts on the solar development:

- Approximately 101 hectares of land.
- Solar panels with a power generation capacity of around 49.9MW.
- Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with a capacity of 10MW, to store and supply power when the sun doesn't shine.
- Solar panels set on lightweight frames in rows spaced 2.5m apart, with a minimum ground clearance of 0.6m and a maximum panel height of up to 3m.
- Substation with a control room, storage units and electrical bay.
- Inverters and transformers to convert power from DC (Direct Current) to AC (Alternating Current).
- Site access roads and internal access tracks through each field for operation and maintenance.
- Deer fencing around the site of up to 2m in height.
- Underground cables and a single new above-ground pole adjacent to the existing power line.
- Approximately 1km of new hedgerow at the site boundary, as well as enhancement of existing hedgerows to screen the development from view and enhance biodiversity.

### Why have you chosen this location for Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar?

We have carefully considered the best location for the solar development, both operationally and in terms of minimising impacts on the community and environment. The proposed site was identified following our standard site selection process, which includes consideration of grid connection availability, local context and landowner sentiment.

### Why is Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar needed?

The UK is transitioning to zero and low carbon sources of power. All coal fired power stations have to close by 2025, meaning over a quarter of the UK's energy generation needs to be replaced. The UK's climate change ambitions are amongst the highest in Europe and the aim to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 is set in law.

By 2050 we could also use 80% more electricity than we do today. For example, electric vehicle ownership has grown thirty-fold and is set to rise with the abolition of new diesel and petrol cars by 2040.

Currently the UK's electricity price is the among the highest in Europe, meaning that we need to find ways of generating more affordable, renewable and clean electricity. Energy security for the country is now of paramount importance.

### **What benefits will Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar bring?**

Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar could supply the electricity needs of approximately 24,400 homes per year.

It will support North Yorkshire Council's ambition for the area to be net zero carbon by 2034 and the clean energy generated will save on average 21,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, which adds up to just over 950,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over the next 50 years.

We are looking at ways to help ensure that the community benefits from the proposed solar development. This may include setting up a Community Benefit Fund to support local projects and we would like to hear your ideas on what benefits you would like to see delivered. Please share any ideas or suggestions with us using our feedback form.

### **Will the proposed Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar development impact any public rights of way (PRoW)?**

A Public Right of Way (PRoW), known as Footpath 10.141 9/1, borders the site to the east and the north. We do not anticipate impacting on this route.

### **What are the timescales for Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar?**

We are currently doing surveys and assessments to inform our proposals, as well as consulting the local community and stakeholders. All this work will inform our final proposals, which we are aiming to submit in a planning application to North Yorkshire Council in Spring 2025. This is dependent on whether our team of specialists identify the need for any ecological surveys in Spring 2025 being required ahead of submission. This will be determined in liaison with the council.

Should planning permission be granted, we anticipate that construction will then take up to six months to complete.

### **Where will Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar connect to the National Grid?**

The solar development will be connected to the National Grid via the existing 132kV overhead power line that crosses the eastern side of the site. This will mainly be underground, emerging onto a single pole adjacent to the existing power line.

### **Will solar really work in this location?**

Solar panels need daylight and sunshine, not high temperatures, so solar panels can and do work well in England.

### **What will happen when the solar development is no longer needed?**

The Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar development will be temporary, with an operational period of approximately 50 years. At the end of the development's lifespan, the site will be decommissioned with the land returned to full agricultural use, with improved soil quality.

## Who are Ampyr Solar Europe?

Ampyr Solar Europe is the developer of this project and was created in 2021 through the merger of NaGa Solar with the existing Ampyr Energy UK joint venture between AGP Group and Hartree Partners.

For this project, we have created a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) called Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar Limited. SPVs are often used for solar developments and operate as separate legal entities, which help attract investment. This SPV brings together highly experienced partners to help accelerate the transition to a zero-carbon future.

## COMMUNITY

### Will local communities be able to have their say on your proposals?

Yes – this consultation is your opportunity to fully understand the scheme, ask us questions, and share your feedback. We will consider all feedback received and use it to inform our proposals. We would also like to hear suggestions on how we can deliver community benefits through the scheme.

This consultation is running until 10 December 2024. Views can be shared on the project in one of the following ways.

- Online: using the online form at [www.suttonontheforestssolar.co.uk](http://www.suttonontheforestssolar.co.uk)
- Email: using the scheme email address - [contact@ampyrsolareurope.com](mailto:contact@ampyrsolareurope.com)
- Post: using the scheme Freepost address - **Freepost ASE**
- At our consultation event at Huby Village Hall on Thursday 21 November, from 12pm to 6.30pm. Here you will be able to fill in a hard copy form and submit it to a member of the project team.

### How are we involving the community?

We are now consulting the local community on our proposals, in advance of submitting a planning application to North Yorkshire Council in 2025. This consultation is your opportunity to fully understand the scheme, ask us questions, and share your feedback. We will consider all feedback received and use it to inform our proposals.

Once the planning application is submitted, North Yorkshire Council will host a statutory consultation, where you will be able to comment further, directly to the council. At this point, we will also share an update with the local community on how feedback has influenced our proposals.

We will stay in touch through the development of the scheme, including through our scheme website: [www.suttonontheforestssolar.co.uk](http://www.suttonontheforestssolar.co.uk).

### How will the local community benefit from the scheme?

We are looking at ways to help ensure that the local community benefits from the development. This may include setting up a Community Benefit Fund to support local infrastructure projects.

We would also like to hear your ideas on what benefits you would like to see delivered. Any ideas or suggestions can be shared with us using our consultation feedback form.

## ENVIRONMENT

### **Have you considered the impact of Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar on the environment?**

We are working hard to be mindful of the environment at the site. We are doing this by undertaking a number of surveys to make sure we understand any the impacts the development may have.

Surveys are being carried out to assess the proposed Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar development's likely effects on the environment, landscape, heritage and local community. We are also looking at ways to enhance local ecology and biodiversity through the project.

Early engagement has been undertaken with regulatory bodies and we are in discussions about whether an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required for this development.

### **Have you considered the impact of Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar on ecology and biodiversity?**

Conserving and enhancing the biodiversity around the proposed Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar development is important to us. We have undertaken surveys to understand if there are any protected wildlife and habitats at the site, as well as to identify any mitigation required to minimise impacts on them. The surveys completed so far have concluded that the solar development is not anticipated to have a significant impact on the local ecology, wildlife or habitats of the area.

### **How will local wildlife and habitat benefit?**

We will also be working to enhance the natural environment through our work at Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar. Some options we are considering include:

- species-rich grassland seeding in the fields containing the solar panels (beneath, in between and surrounding them); and
- planting trees, hedgerows, a species-rich grassland mix, and a wildflower meadow on sections of the site to support habitat creation and help with screening.

### **Will there be more traffic in the area because of Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar?**

We anticipate that the construction of the Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar will take up to six months to complete. During construction, there is likely to be more traffic due to materials being delivered to the site, but when the solar development is operational additional traffic would be limited to maintenance vehicles less than once a week.

During the construction phase, access to the western section of the site will be from the A19 and local roads into New Parks Estate, connecting to the rest of the site, as well as via York Road and Sutton Road (B1363) to the east and existing field accesses. Site traffic will consist of HGVs, light goods vehicles and cars. Movements during the construction phase are expected to have a minimal impact on the local network, and measures to mitigate any such impacts will be detailed in the Transport Statement submitted with the planning application.

Traffic management measures may be implemented for cable installation works, however these will be short term and are not likely to cause significant disruption. We will also consider any cumulative impacts from other nearby works.

### **Will Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar create a glint / glare issue?**

Glint and glare are visual effects that can sometimes affect nearby motorists or homes. Solar panels are designed to maximise the absorbency of the sun's rays, and this means that glint and glare levels will be lower compared to surfaces such as window glass, water, or snow. We are also undertaking a Glint and Glare assessment, which will be submitted with the planning application and, where necessary, any significant effects would be mitigated through additional planting.

### **Will there be any noise / buzz from the panels or battery storage?**

Solar panels themselves do not make any noise and there are no known health issues associated with being near solar developments. When the solar development is operational, low levels of noise can be generated by the electrical system, such as from the inverters, which can sound like a quiet buzz or fan noise. The closest homes to any potential noise emitting equipment, including the inverters, substation and the BESS will be at least 250m away, meaning any such noise will not be audible.

We propose to minimise operational noise impacts by locating the battery and energy storage system (BESS) in the compound and away from people, homes, and amenities. We will also house transformers in cabins to reduce potential noise emissions. More information on these impacts will be detailed in a Noise Impact Assessment, submitted as part of our planning application in 2025.

The construction of the solar development will take place quickly as minimal digging is required. The potential effects of noise and vibration during construction will be limited to specific locations within the site and only for short periods. We will make the community aware when works are likely to take place and details of our limited working hours will be set out in our planning application.

### **Is there a risk of flooding at the site?**

Most of the site is within Flood Zone 1, meaning it is categorized as an area with a 'lowest' risk of flooding. However, some areas of the site are within Flood Zone 2 and Flood Zone 3 (highest risk of flooding). This means we are carefully considering potential flood mitigation measures in our design process.

As part of our planning application, we will submit a Flood Risk Assessment that will demonstrate how the risk of flooding will be managed without increasing flood risk to the development itself, or elsewhere.

### **Will there be any impacts on local heritage from the works?**

The planning application will include a Heritage Assessment that assesses any potential impacts on the setting and character of heritage sites, and the potential for undiscovered archaeological remains.

A geophysical survey will be undertaken and will use magnetometry (magnetic detection) in order to determine the potential for buried archaeology beneath the ground. Consultation with the North Yorkshire Council archaeologist and further assessment will determine whether and how any findings are investigated.

### **How high will the solar panels be?**

The panels will have a minimum ground clearance of 0.6m and a maximum panel height of 3m. Generally, the panels should be no higher than 2.83m above ground level, though some may be raised higher due to topography. As tracker panels, the height of the solar panels will vary from their midday point at 1.83m high, to their full height. This means that the visual effects of the solar development will be limited for the communities surrounding the site.

### **How will the solar panels be screened?**

Hedgerows around the site would be maintained to screen the development from external views. Where there are existing gaps in the hedgerow, additional infill planting with native hedgerow species would be considered to improve screening and enhanced biodiversity benefit. Approximately 1km of new hedgerows will be planted at the site boundary. Any further landscaping requirements would be proposed by a project landscape architect following completion of a Landscape and Visual Assessment.

### **Will there be any impacts on food security and agricultural land?**

We know that food security is important. The National Food Strategy, which is an independent review for Government, notes that the next big shock to our food supply will almost certainly be caused by climate change in the form of extreme weather events and catastrophic harvest failures. It follows that addressing climate change, including by using solar energy, will improve the security of our food supply.

In addition, Solar Energy UK published a paper about the Facts About Solar Energy – in it, they note that to meet the government's net zero target, the 75 to 90 GW of solar required by 2050 would at most account for approximately 0.4 – 0.6% of UK land, or less than the amount currently used for golf courses.

During the solar development's life span, which is approximately 50 years, the ground beneath the solar panels will be seeded with species-rich grassland. The area under the panels can also be safely used for grazing small livestock such as sheep, since the panels will have a minimum ground clearance of 0.6m. This will help to continue agricultural use of the land after the site is built. After its operational period, the solar development will be decommissioned and the land returned to full agricultural use.

## **OTHER**

### **Does the UK risk being covered with solar developments?**

The Government's 'Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener' commits the UK to be powered entirely by clean electricity by 2035, subject to security of supply. To deliver the strategy, overall electricity demand is expected to increase 40-60% by 2035, all met from low carbon sources. This means that the number of solar developments in the UK will increase. However, solar developments in the UK currently account for only 0.08% of total land use.

### **Are there any risks associated with battery storage?**

The safety of local communities is at the forefront of all our work at Sutton-on-the-Forest Solar. Our design will reflect the North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's Battery Energy Storage Systems requirements and the Service and North Yorkshire Council will be consulted during all stages of the scheme. An Outline Battery Safety Management Plan will be submitted as part of a future application incorporating the National Fire Chiefs Council Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage System planning – Guidance for FRS.