

A yellow circular logo with the text "Solar Energy UK" in black, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the entire image is a blue-tinted photograph of a solar farm with rows of solar panels stretching into the distance, and a herd of sheep grazing in the foreground.

**Solar
Energy
UK**

Solar Energy UK

**11 Commitments on
Solar Farms**

Code of Conduct

Solar farm developers, owners and operators who are members of Solar Energy UK are committed to developing best practice in the following areas:

Good Land Management

1. We will develop on non-agricultural land or land which is of lower agricultural quality where this is available.
2. We will enhance the biodiversity and natural capital value of all solar sites, being sensitive and complementing nationally and locally protected landscapes and nature conservation areas.
3. We will deliver multi-functional land use by proposing co-location with agriculture and/or nature recovery projects for solar and energy storage developments.

Respect for Landscape, Local Heritage and Access

4. We will minimise visual impact where possible, making visual enhancements, and including appropriate screening, such as tree planting and restoring hedgerows, throughout the lifetime of the project. These will be managed through landscape and visual impact assessments.
5. We will accommodate needs for rights of way and sites of archaeological importance
6. At the end of a project's life, we will ensure full decommissioning of the equipment and return the land in a similar or improved state as before.

Community Engagement and Benefits

7. We will engage with the community in advance of submitting a planning application.
8. We will support the local economy through local business rates, diversification of farm income and encouraging as many employment and training opportunities locally as possible.
9. We will act considerately during construction and ensure all health and safety issues are addressed throughout the lifetime of the project.
10. We will engage and provide detailed information to the local community and listen to their views and suggestions, including the provision of specific community benefit schemes, or use of the site as an educational opportunity, where appropriate.

Responsible Sourcing

11. We will work towards the highest supply chain standards possible, working with the UK and European solar industry to do so. Please note that more information on this will be made public in Autumn 2022.

Supporting Notes, Guidance and Evidence

Good Land Management

Ground-mounted solar projects should utilise previously developed land e.g. Brownfield sites, contaminated and industrial land, and land of lower agricultural quality (as identified in the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)). ALC is the classification method which provides guidance on land quality based on quality and versatility of land and is split between six gradings.

'Best and Most Versatile' (BMV) land is presently defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a (which can best deliver future crops for food and 'non-food' uses such as biomass, fibres, pharmaceuticals etc) and grades 3b, 4 and 5 (which can best deliver low yield crops and grasses). In some cases, best and most versatile land is not always farmed for food production, and may be used simply for pasture or left fallow to rest.

When selecting land for a solar project, developers should seek to avoid land BMV. However, in instances where this is not possible, projects should show consideration as to how additional value can be added to the site (for example, through biodiversity net gain) to counter any potential loss of BMV land.

Solar farms do not make a temporary change to land use (typically for 25-40 years), and with careful consideration can be constructed without permanently alternating the land or BMV status. This is unlike housing developments, commercial developments, or recreational projects such as golf courses, which can permanently alter land use.

In some circumstances, there may be possible exceptions to standard land use policies. Developers should note the policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and planning documents within their jurisdiction which may differ from NPPF.

- Large farms with a high volume of electricity self-consumption eg cold storage plant.
- Where the farmer can demonstrate that land quality is lower than the ALC, or is no longer usable for agricultural crops, or was never cropped.
- In areas where all the land is of higher quality and it would be considered unreasonable to exclude development on these grounds alone (for example, in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire it is hard to avoid land which has a designated high grade, whereas Cornwall has lots of low-grade land compared with the rest of the country).
- For enhanced environmental benefits, eg protection of peat land or soil resting.
- Where sites have a combination of grades, part of which are higher than grade 3a and 3b.
- For reasons of national interest (eg MOD land).

Useful documents:

- [Natural Capital Best Practice Guidance](#)
- [BRE Agricultural Good Practice for Solar Farms](#)
- [BRE Planning Guidance for the Development of Large-Scale Ground Mount Solar Farms](#)

Multi functional land use

Well designed and well managed solar farms can deliver more than green energy generation; utilising space to support the continuation of some agricultural practices (e.g sheep grazing) and promote biodiversity enhancements.

Developers should seek to:

- Increase biodiversity on solar farms by following industry Natural Capital Best Practice Guidance.
- Work collaboratively with local landowners/farmers to support sheep grazing on solar sites.

Useful Documents:

- [Natural Capital Best Practice Guidance](#)
- [BRE Agricultural Good Practice for Solar Farms](#)

Responsible construction

During all stages of construction, solar developers should act in a responsible manner, minimising disturbance to residents and long-term impacts to the immediate and surrounding ecology.

To deliver a project responsibly, developers should look to:

- Following a Construction Environmental Management plan (CEMP) to reduce construction impacts eg soil compaction and damage to land drains.
- Work with ecological consultants throughout the construction phase to monitor and prevent long term disruption to ecology.
- Timing of construction should be carefully considered – construction during the summer months is preferable.
- Choosing panel mounting system to suit site conditions, archaeology, etc.
- Storing and replacing topsoil and subsoil separately and in the right order while trenching.

Useful Documents:

[Natural Capital Best Practice Guidance](#)

[Construction Environmental Management Plan](#)

Respect for Landscape, Local Heritage, and Access

When selecting an appropriate site, consideration should be given to the surrounding local area (inclusive of local heritage sites, areas of high biodiversity value or statutorily protected areas for example sites of Special Scientific Interest) alongside commercial considerations, such as economic viability of the grid connection.

Each site should be considered on a site-by-site basis. Sites should aim to avoid high levels of visual impact and seek to maintain and enhance the natural beauty of the landscapes.

Flat landscapes are best for PV projects, well screened by hedges and treelines and not unduly impacting nearby domestic properties or roads.

Negatively impacting visual amenities can be avoided with appropriate screening mechanisms:

- Hedgerow planting and infilling of existing gaps in hedgerows around the boundary of the site to hide the view of equipment. Replacing any dead or diseased screening.
- Maintaining hedging to an appropriate height and in a healthy order to encourage and support ecology.
- Where possible avoiding extensive views into the site from roads, public rights of way, and hillsides.
- A comprehensive Landscape and Ecological Management Plan to enhance ecology and manage the site for the duration of the project.
- Potential for partnerships with conservation groups and local community groups to protect and support vulnerable plant or animal species.

Useful Documents:

- [Natural Capital Best Practice Guidance](#)
- [Landscape and Ecological Management Plan](#)

Community Engagement and Benefits

Early involvement from local communities during the planning stages of a solar farm is a key part of any project and can be helpful to understand local priorities and provides an opportunity to include and support local conservation efforts, for example tree planting, flood alleviation or protection of a local species.

Solar Energy UK are developing a standardised approach to engaging with communities throughout the design, construction, operation, and end of life of solar projects.

Community consultation and engagement can take many forms, depending on the project, however where appropriate developers should look to include, one or more of the following:

- Local consultations. Developers will organise public events and exhibitions to explain the intended project, provide information and plans on what it will look like. Member of the public are encouraged to ask questions and share feedback.

- Online surveys. Developers will seek feedback through digital engagement. Key documents are made available online for the public to familiarise themselves with and comment on the plans.
- Additional engagement could include newspaper articles, flyers, local advertising, parish council meetings, knocking on neighbouring doors (also see guidance for >50MW projects).

Useful Documents:

- [BRE Community Engagement Good Practice for Solar Farms](#)
- [Natural Capital Best Practice Guidance](#)

Responsible Sourcing

The solar industry takes sustainability seriously, and ensuring an ethical supply chain is key to any project development. At a minimum, we recommend and encourage all Solar Energy UK members to follow the guidance below in their procurement processes:

1. Adopt an Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standard and require suppliers and business partners to abide by them. Where possible require compliance via contractual obligations as part of the tender process.
2. Implement a supplier qualification process which includes specific ESG requirements such as abiding to your standards and encouraging them to engage and share results of audits.
3. Perform due diligence on suppliers' ESG commitment to implement international standards on environmental, health and safety, and labour issues; assess their capacity to manage ESG risks and require evidence of their acting upon findings.
4. Track suppliers' responses and improvements over time, in particular following your due diligence and engagement.
5. Track company actions against any potential issues or non-compliance identified from engagement, follow up on due diligence or disengagement.
6. Report to stakeholders on any action taken against any issues identified as part of your supplier qualification process.
7. Sign Solar Energy UK's industry supply chain statement and support industry initiatives underway on responsible sourcing.

Useful Documents:

- [SEUK Responsible Sourcing Guidance](#)
- [UK Industry supply chain statement](#)
- [Solar Sustainability – Best Practice Benchmark](#)



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