



OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER

24 September 2025

Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

A problematic solar power strategy: rural communities across the UK are being misled, sidelined and disempowered

At a recent Prime Minister's Questions, you responded to a question from the member for Ely and East Cambridgeshire, Charlotte Cane, on the 2,400-acre Sunnica solar scheme – already approved by your government against the recommendation of its own planning inspectors. You told the House that communities “will always have a say in any decisions that we make”. Unfortunately, this could not be further from the truth.

The government is promoting plans for an unprecedented form of UK solar infrastructure – a vast new fleet of industrial-sized, ground-mounted solar power developments designed to be built on agricultural land. We represent volunteer groups committed to raising awareness of the significant impacts resulting from this new breed of oversized solar scheme on tens of thousands of people living and working in rural communities spanning from Anglesey to Yorkshire, from the Cotswolds to Kent. We have no “say” in these plans. A ‘consultation’ process which routinely fails to reflect local community concerns or deliver any meaningful modifications to these massive schemes is one of the issues we are grappling with, but there are many more, and scale is at the heart of our disquiet.

Each enormous scheme is categorised as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). Most have a capacity of at least 400 megawatts (MW) and cover farmland of 2,000 acres or much more. Under the Planning Act 2008, NSIPs require development consent from a Secretary of State. Some of the schemes from around 60 NSIP-scale proposals in the planning pipeline have already been approved for construction. These planned mega projects alone would cover more than 110,000 acres of our countryside.

This new category of solar scheme is like nothing that has gone before. Each colossal solar facility would typically have the footprint of an international airport. Many are clustered, creating vast solar zones the size of a town. Countryside the equivalent of an entire county is set to be covered in grid-scale solar infrastructure.

The huge size of these schemes is a product of the fact that the UK climate cannot support high solar power yields. We have one of the lowest solar photovoltaic capacity factors – just 9.9% last year – and yet the UK is the only country in Europe to prioritise switching farmland to highly intermittent solar power production on an industrial scale.

In theory, Development Consent Orders (DCOs) for these overscaled NSIP solar projects are issued following extensive consultation with local communities. In practice, it is abundantly clear that the views of communities directly affected by the proposed construction and operation of solar NSIPs are simply being sidestepped. ‘Consultation’ is by definition a two-way exercise. But developers often ignore or half-answer questions, mislead or misinform the communities they are targeting, and make it clear they are going through the motions. Their dialogue with the affected communities is not a consultation; it is a *fait accompli*.

The government’s recently published Solar Roadmap pays lip service to the installation of solar panels on rooftops and on car park canopies. Yet the large corporates and investors applying for massive ground-mounted NSIPs enjoy far greater support from government. As communities bearing the brunt of Clean Power 2030 and Net Zero 2050 targets, we see that these NSIPs are undermining the government’s claim that its solar transition always aims to safeguard local democracy. Speaking in the House of Commons in December 2024, Parliamentary Undersecretary for Energy Security and Net Zero Kerry McCarthy pledged that her government had made a “steadfast commitment that those who host clean energy infrastructure should benefit from it.” This letter sets out why this promise is hollow and wholly undeliverable.

That the interests of multinational developers are routinely prioritised over those of the individuals whose lives they will affect is immediately evident from the core issues that concern us: the size, location and cumulative impact of sites earmarked for large-scale solar projects. Genuflecting to developers’ self-serving pursuit of economies of scale, the government is greenlighting huge concentrations of solar schemes. Many of these would have a significant cumulative impact close to or adjoining areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs), ancient conservation villages and listed buildings where development would not ordinarily be permitted. The result is that time-honoured legal protections for ecology, heritage and property rights all risk being sacrificed on the altar of Net Zero targets increasingly regarded as unrealistic and financially crippling for the UK economy.

The community groups behind this letter are concerned that neither the government nor the public have a sufficient grasp of the probable impact of solar NSIPs on rural neighbourhoods throughout the UK. This is chiefly because, bar the recently completed 900-acre Cleve Hill site in Kent, there is no established precedent in this country for an operational solar NSIP, let alone for one which has been beneficial to local communities or biodiversity.

In the absence of operational solar NSIPs, all precedents cited by the most vocal advocates of ground-mounted solar refer perforce to projects which are minuscule by comparison. The government’s Solar Roadmap, published as recently as June 2025, used the example of a 3.6MW site near Sheringham in Norfolk covering 20 acres as a case study of a solar ‘farm’ that has “implemented a range of biodiversity and landscape improvements” to support its use for agricultural purposes. This project is less than one-hundredth the size of a typical NSIP. This makes any comparison with large-scale ground-mounted solar projects meaningless and invalidates its suitability as a case study.

Similarly, when she enthusiastically endorsed the government’s solar strategy in a House of Commons debate in May 2025, the Member of Parliament for Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard presented Eggington, a farm in her constituency, as an exemplar of the happy coexistence of solar panels and biodiversity. “As well as producing ... clean, green power, it retains an agricultural use,” she told the House. “There are also sheep grazing between the solar panels, nibbling at the grass. ... I learned on my visit that solar farms can also be useful to some of our ground-nesting birds, which find shelter and sanctuary underneath the solar panels.”

The plant described by the Member for Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard is a 5MW installation misleadingly showcased by renewables company Lightsource BP as an educative poster child for solar energy. When it invited students from the ESCP Business School to the site, Lightsource BP reported that its visitors gained “valuable insights into the operation of a solar project and explored the challenges and opportunities of the energy transition in the UK.” This is a disingenuous claim. An inspection of a 5MW solar site provides no guidance whatsoever into the appearance, functioning and impact of a facility one hundred times larger.

Nor does it give the remotest insight into the impact that solar NSIPs will have on the rural communities and villages they will adjoin. It is these communities, rather than those in the vicinity of Sheringham or Eggington, that will be required to shoulder a wholly disproportionate share of the socioeconomic consequences of the government's commitment to industrial-sized solar projects. The impact – much of which is already being felt – will be palpable. In most cases it will also be irreversible.

Dreading years of construction chaos, and faced with the prospect of living in 'countryside' converted to sprawling fields of energy infrastructure – millions of photovoltaic panels racked high, substations and battery compounds packed with container units, industry-standard security – we are already aware of longstanding residents reluctantly leaving villages and hamlets. They are often forced to sell their properties at lower valuations than they would have expected under normal circumstances. They are incurring considerable moving costs and risking losing contact with friends and neighbours.

In relative terms, these NSIP exiles are the lucky ones. Some less fortunate will find their properties unsellable at virtually any price. Others will be forced to relocate because their livelihoods will be irreversibly undermined by the construction and operation of large-scale solar installations and battery energy storage systems (BESS). There have already been well-documented cases of tenant farmers set to lose both their livelihoods and their homes. Owners of shops, cafes, restaurants and hotels are rightly fearful of the impact that the installation of hundreds of thousands of solar panels will have on their businesses.

More troubling still is the predicament faced by an increasing number of individuals who have been served or threatened by land agents and developers with compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) on their properties. These individuals are seldom if ever wealthy landowners. More often, they are vulnerable pensioners of modest means notified by law firms of the imminent loss of land that in some instances has been in their families for generations. These threats do not just betoken possible financial hardship. For many, drawn against their will into complex and bewildering but fruitless legal proceedings, they also cause intense distress and confusion.

Many of those that remain in their homes – voluntarily or otherwise – will find their surroundings and lifestyles permanently changed. Played down by developers, it is worth spelling this out in more detail. No amount of so-called community benefits can compensate for the disruption that will be caused during a typical NSIP's two to three year construction period. Narrow country lanes will be widened to cater to vehicles weighing 40 tonnes or more and requiring police escorts. New roads will be built to provide access to BESS facilities. Metal plates will be laid down to allow trucks with as many as 16 axles to negotiate corners that are demonstrably unsuitable for such large vehicles. Hedgerows will be torn down to accommodate the two-way flow of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and those bearing abnormal loads. Footpaths and bridleways that have served ramblers, dog-walkers and horse-riders for generations will be made unsafe and inaccessible.

Beyond lengthy build projects bringing disruption and danger to rural roads and communities, the relentless pounding of pile drivers hammering down foundations to support endless rows of racking will give way to the persistent whine of solar inverters. Floodlights, CCTV and other security devices aimed at deterring increasing levels of criminal targeting of solar sites will industrialise green fields. Fencing will disorient and, in some cases, entrap and kill wildlife. During periods of heavy rain, concentrations of run-off will increase flood risk.

As for the solar panels themselves, these are expected to reach heights of 4.5 or even 5.5 metres – roughly the height of a double-decker bus. It is fanciful to postulate that the visual impact of panel racking at this height can be mitigated by replanting of trees and hedgerows. It would take years or decades for these to approach the height required to hide the unsightly infrastructure required for the construction and operation of these colossal projects. Native deciduous trees will, in any case, only provide effective screening during the six months or so that they are in leaf.

The far-reaching visual impact of NSIPs is one of several reasons why we question the integrity of the assertion frequently made by champions of ground-mounted solar that these projects will cover no more than 0.4 per cent of UK land. This estimate is fundamentally misleading. It makes no allowance for the much larger areas visually blighted by solar NSIPs. Nor does it consider the damage done to land acquired by developers for cable connections to the grid, which can stretch well beyond 10 miles. It is in any case disingenuous to talk in terms of UK land, and far more appropriate to focus on the farmland set to disappear under the solar development land grab, estimated to be as much as 5% of all UK cropland, so essential for our food security.

Beyond the aesthetic, ecological, social and economic damage visited on rural communities by the industrialisation of our countryside, those living in the shadow of solar NSIPs will be subjected to the potentially devastating explosion and fire risks associated with BESS infrastructure. BESS installations are integral to developers' business models because they allow them to trade energy and maximise their profits. But these systems, consisting of containers filled with thousands of racked lithium-ion battery cells, are known to be vulnerable to thermal runaway. The resultant fires are near-impossible to extinguish and can release extensive, highly toxic emissions to the air, ground and water. Local fire services are not adequately staffed, trained or equipped to deal with these serious emergencies – and access to rural sites is likely to be problematic. There are still no specific regulations governing this risky new application of battery technology and, astonishingly, no rules governing how far from homes, schools, hospitals or businesses they should be built.

These seismic changes will amount to much more than a minor inconvenience for those living in the shadow of solar NSIPs. The lives of thousands of individuals will be irretrievably blighted by these developments, which will take a considerable financial, emotional and mental toll on members of rural communities throughout the UK.

The legacy of these giant projects will be landscapes, productive arable land and farming expertise that are lost for ever. Developers' claims that land used for industrial-scale NSIPs will be fit for a return to its original use after 40 or 60 years are laughable.

The principal beneficiaries of these incalculable harms, meanwhile, will be overseas developers, investors and companies with dubious track records motivated exclusively by the pursuit of short-term profits. Based on industrial-sized projects either already consented or in the pipeline, the largest investor in the UK's solar NSIP market is Macquarie Asset Management, via its wholly owned subsidiary, Island Green Power (IGP). Macquarie is widely held responsible for the near-bankruptcy of Thames Water and the sharp increase in bills for the utility's 16 million customers. The Australian company's prioritisation of shareholder returns over responsible environmental stewardship is also alleged to have contributed to levels of pollution in the Thames regarded as hazardous to human health. Does a Labour government genuinely want to reward Australia's so-called Vampire Kangaroo for its rapacious opportunism and environmental vandalism by handing it control over large tracts of prime UK farmland for at least a generation?

Against this backdrop, we would welcome the opportunity to share our views on overscale solar development with you in person. We are not political ideologues and we are not climate change deniers. We are real people who care for the environment, and whose lives are already being directly and demonstrably affected by the government's flawed solar power strategy.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss clean energy alternatives that would not destroy such vast tracts of our countryside. We strongly believe that sharing our experiences with you would be mutually beneficial.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Stop Oversized Solar

stop.oversized.solar.uk@gmail.com

cc: Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero
Opposition party leaders

Stop Oversized Solar Community groups opposing Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) solar proposals in Anglesey, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, Wiltshire and Yorkshire: Block East Pye Solar • Claydons Solar Action Group • East Riding Against Solar Expansion • Fields of Glass • Grwp Cadw Tir Môn • Hands Off Our Marsh • Kingsway Solar Community Action • Mallard Pass Action Group • Say No To Sunnica • Springwell Solar Action Group • Stop East Park Energy • Stop Greenhill Solar • Stop Lime Down • Stop Mylen Leah • Villages Against Solar Threat