



Solar Farms: 10 Commitments

Solar farm developers, builders or tenants who are members of the STA will comply with the following best practice guidance:

1. We will focus on non-agricultural land or land which is of lower agricultural quality.
2. We will be sensitive to nationally and locally protected landscapes and nature conservation areas, and we welcome opportunities to enhance the ecological value of the land.
3. We will minimise visual impact where possible and maintain appropriate screening throughout the lifetime of the project managed through a Land Management and/or Ecology plan.
4. We will engage with the community in advance of submitting a planning application.
5. We will encourage land diversification by proposing continued agricultural use or incorporating biodiversity measures within our projects.
6. We will do as much buying and employing locally as possible.
7. We will act considerately during construction, and demonstrate 'solar stewardship' of the land for the lifetime of the project.
8. We will seek the support of the local community and listen to their views and suggestions.
9. We commit to using the solar farm as an educational opportunity, where appropriate.
10. At the end of the project life we will return the land to its former use.





Notes to support 10 Commitments

Land use - ideal siting of a solar farm should consider:

'Ground-mounted solar should ideally utilise previously developed land, brownfield, contaminated land, industrial land and preferably agricultural land of classification 3a, 3b, 4, and 5 (in most instances avoiding use of the "Best and Most Versatile" cropland where possible). Land selected should aim to avoid affecting the visual amenity of landscapes, maintaining their natural beauty, and should be predominantly flat, well screened by hedges, tree lines, etc., and not unduly impact upon nearby domestic properties or roads.'

It should be noted that the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) was first introduced in 1966, based upon fairly coarse-scaled grid cells (1 mile x 1 mile - about 250 hectares). It was intended for strategic guidance on land quality for planners, and not really for assessment of individual fields or development sites. In 1988, ALC guidance was updated with further subdivision of the old five grades in 1976 to add Grades 3a and 3b. The '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). However, such land is not always farmed, and may be used simply for pasture or set aside. Land may benefit from being 'rested' or from active plant or wildlife habitat development. Under guidance of an agronomist, it is easy to revert back to agricultural use from energy generation, without altering the BMV status of the land, unlike housing or commercial development.

Examples of possible exceptions to such land use rules (developers should note the policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and supplementary guidance):

- Large farms with a high volume of electricity self-consumption e.g. 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, e.g. 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 (e.g. MOD land).

Visual impact and land management – this should incorporate:

- Hedging to hide the view of equipment and non-farm fencing.
- Maintaining hedging to an appropriate height and in a healthy order to encourage bird and animal life.
- Replacing any dead or diseased screening.
- Avoiding extensive views into the site from roads, public rights of way, and hillsides.
- A comprehensive Land Management plan to enhance ecology and manage the site for the duration.
- Potential for partnerships with conservation groups to protect and support vulnerable plant or animal species.

Community engagement – where appropriate we would include:

Newspaper articles, flyers, local advertising, parish council meetings, knocking on neighbouring doors (also see guidance for >50MW projects).

Dual land use – examples of biodiversity are:

Sheep grazing, bird nesting, bee keeping, pheasants, bat boxes, birds of prey and other small animals, flower meadows.

Solar 'stewardship' – this should incorporate:

- Avoiding soil compaction and damage to land drains.
- Choosing panel mounting system to suit site conditions, archaeology, etc.
- Storing and replacing topsoil and subsoil separately and in the right order while trenching.

