

The Problem With Solar Panel Farms



Over the last year or two we've seen an increasing number of proposals to build sprawling solar farms that will have a negative impact on our countryside. In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough we've objected to an application from Sunnica Ltd for a solar farm straddling East Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk

(<https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/downloads/Sunnica-Solar-Farm-RefEN010106.pdf>), and we also objected to a solar farm at Haddon (<https://cprecambs.org.uk/downloads/Haddon-Solar-Farm-Ref22-00668-FUL.pdf>). At the time of writing, we have just learned that planning permission for the Haddon solar farm application has been refused by Huntingdonshire District Council.

We're also concerned about proposals for Mallard Pass solar farm - which affects our neighbours in Lincolnshire and Rutland - and East Park

Energy's proposal to build a solar farm and energy storage scheme to the north-west of St Neots, straddling the administrative boundary of Bedford and Huntingdonshire (<https://www.cprebeds.org.uk/news/east-park-energy/>). We objected to an earlier version of this proposal in July 2023.

Please be reassured that we support well-sited and considered solar farms, like the one at St Ives Park and Ride

([https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/climate-change-action/low-carbon-energy/large-scale-renewable-energy-and-storage/st-ives-park-](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/climate-change-action/low-carbon-energy/large-scale-renewable-energy-and-storage/st-ives-park-and-ride-smart-energy-grid)

[and-ride-smart-energy-grid](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/climate-change-action/low-carbon-energy/large-scale-renewable-energy-and-storage/st-ives-park-and-ride-smart-energy-grid)) and rooftop solar panels

(<https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/campaigns-climate-change-and-energy/2023/05/30/rooftop-revolution-solar-energy-campaign/>) as

contributors to the nation's net-zero target. However, solar farms are not a "one-size-fits-all" solution. Many applications, particularly for massive solar farms, are for inappropriate sites chosen for purely commercial reasons and would undoubtedly affect heritage assets, the Green Belt, areas of outstanding natural beauty, or conservation areas. To these concerns about the impact on landscape quality, wildlife and biodiversity, can be added the negative impact on our valuable Grade 1 and Grade 2 agricultural land (you can read more here,

<https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/downloads/digging-deeper-to-value-our-farmland.pdf>) and the lack of effective solutions for recycling the panels and components. You can read more about these issues here (<https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/downloads/solar-farms.pdf>).

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will continue to monitor these proposals.

East West Rail It Doesn't Add Up

In October we released a joint statement with Cambridge Approaches (<https://www.cambridgeapproaches.org>) and the Stop The Arc Group (STARC) (<https://www.stopthearc.org>) when we discovered that East West Rail (EWR) is even less cost-beneficial than the now-cancelled Birmingham to Manchester HS2. HS2 was designed to operate between two large cities, to improve connections between London and the Northwest and to contribute to the levelling up of the North of England.

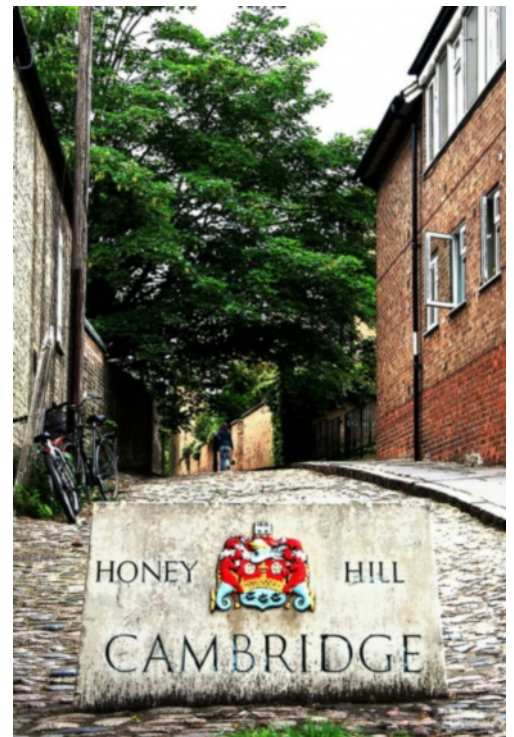
This cannot be said of the Bedford to Cambridge section of EWR, which is forecast to deliver only 2,000 commuters a day into Cambridge at a capital cost of £8bn (before inevitable overspend). This amounts to a state subsidy of four million pounds per Cambridge-based job and comes at huge environmental and carbon cost.

The EWR budget would be better spent on more cost-beneficial transport projects and other much-needed public investments. We are also concerned that the preferred route goes through Cambridge and Newmarket, with considerable negative impacts on the city and town (not to mention the challenge of the seemingly-unconsidered narrow radius chord at Coldham's junction or the single-track tunnel at Newmarket). Furthermore, the line will cause detrimental effects on South Cambridgeshire villages, which will gain zero benefit from it, and on farming and food security. Ultimately, there is no business case for EWR beyond it being used to excuse and enable even more unsustainable housebuilding in Cambridgeshire. You can read more here (<https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/cpre-news/2023/10/10/east-west-rail-bedford-to-cambridge/>)

Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) - Why We Say NO to its Relocation to Honey Hill

We've previously responded to Anglian Water's (AW) consultations on their plans to relocate the Cambridge WWTP from Milton to Honey Hill, which is in the Cambridge Green Belt. In November we wrote to the Planning Inspectorate again outlining our objections and including the points we raised during the Public Inquiry. Our concerns include:

- The impact on the Cambridge Green Belt, which is already under attack. This relocation would set a precedent that would make it difficult to resist further encroachment into the Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 13 indicates the obligation to protect Green Belt land, and we believe that any changes to the boundaries of the very small Cambridge Green Belt are unwarranted.
- AW has publicly stated there is sufficient capacity at the existing CWWTP to meet the needs of the Cambridge area it serves, including planned expansion, until 2050. It has also been demonstrated that a modernised CWWTP using the latest technology could be built on the existing AW site if increased capacity is needed;
- The effect on Protected Sites and Projected Wildlife Improvement Plans – including the Wicken Fen Vision area;
- The reduction in our “best and most versatile agricultural land” given the necessity to produce more locally-grown food in order to combat the impacts of climate change and food shortages;
- The effects of increasing flood risk;
- The apparent plans of AW to disrupt navigation on the River Cam, a significant public waterway.



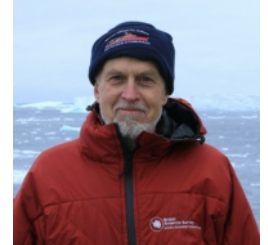
📍 Honey Hill by Andy Field

You can read about these concerns, and others, in more detail in our letter (<https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/cpre-news/2023/12/12/cambridge-waste-water-treatment-plant-no-to-relocation-to-honey-hill/>).

In conclusion, we believe that there is no case to relocate the Cambridge WWTP from its current site at Milton. The existing plant can be safely used until 2050, and there is space on-site for a smaller, technologically modernised facility, to be implemented when required. This is the least cost, least risk option.

2023 Annual General Meeting

Our 2023 AGM was held via Zoom on 26th October. We were delighted to welcome three new committee members. New to the committee are Wendy Blythe, Ian Ralls and Tony Booth, who are all based in Cambridge; they each have extensive experience of campaigning and working with environmental groups.



Dr Rob Larter

Our guest speaker, Dr Rob Larter (pictured) from the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), spoke about the future of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet and the implications for sea-level rise. His presentation was fascinating and very up-to-date, containing data from his latest trip to Antarctica. It was also extremely sobering, clearly demonstrating both the exponential nature of increasing sea level rise, and the growing flood risk to the Cambridgeshire Fens. You can read more about BAS's work here <https://www.bas.ac.uk/>.

“Green Lanes” - Green For Whom?

Over the last few months, we've been approached by local residents and groups anxious about plans to transform the Mere Way ancient trackway (which was part of the Roman road known as Akeman Street) and more recently, the Public Rights of Way route between Soham and Wicken, into a form of 'green lane' for cyclists, pedestrians and horse



📍 Mere Way by Jude Sutton

riders. Both of these proposals will see wide stretches of rural lanes covered in tarmac. We have many concerns about these proposals, not least the impact on the landscape, wildlife, and farm premises' security. We're also not convinced that this is the best use of public funding, nor do we think that the standards documented, following much research, in 2005's Rights of Way – The Way Ahead and its 2016 update, will be adhered to. You can read more in our Mere Way position statement: <https://www.cprecambs.org.uk/download/S/Mere-Way.pdf>. We will keep you updated.

Alternatives to Burning – Plastic Waste Re-use and Re-processing

As previously reported, we've objected to both ENVAR's medical waste incinerator at Woodhurst (the application was refused, but ENVAR is appealing the decision) and the proposal for a major waste incinerator close to the centre of Wisbech. Much of the waste that would be incinerated on these sites is plastic. This does not decompose in landfill but, if necessary, can be stored on site until it can be processed and either re-used or recycled using developing technologies. As we researched incinerators, it became increasingly clear that technologies for managing the re-use and recycling of plastic waste are increasing rapidly in capability, capacity and type. These processes include:

- An ongoing project led by Iowa State University working on upcycling plastic waste into liquid lubricants, including oil, hydraulic fluids, heat transfer fluids and greases.
- The Irish technology company TRIFOL's process which transforms plastic waste into olefin waxes for use as new plastic, lubricants or fuels;
- Use of genetically engineered microbes to convert waste PET (Polyethylene terephthalate) plastic into vanillin, the extract from the vanilla plant widely used in food and cosmetics;
- A process making black plastic food-packaging waste identifiable and hence available for recycling using existing waste sorting machinery;
- A process using chemical markers that has been proven to quickly and accurately segregate food-grade plastics for recycling;
- The feasibility of producing plastic railway sleepers to UK standards from mixed plastic waste;
- Using waste plastic as a component of road surfaces.

You can read more about these exciting technologies, including links to further information, in our objection letter to the ENVAR Woodhurst incinerator (<https://www.cprecamb.org.uk/downloads/CPRE-Cambds-Somersham-ENVAR-CCC-21-088-FUL.pdf>)

We regard it as totally unsustainable to burn materials that are already, or in future are likely to become, reusable or recyclable. Incineration of oil-derived, plastic waste is merely delayed oil-burning. It should be treated as such and banned, just as classic coal and oil-burning power stations have been.

Octavia Hill, CPRE and the Green Belt

It is timely to reflect on the life of social reformer and campaigner Octavia Hill, a co-founder of the National Trust, who was born in Wisbech on 3rd December 1838, and her influence on the countryside.

She believed in the importance of access to nature for human wellbeing, and the need to stop the destruction of the natural landscape. Her interest in, and passion for, preserving places of historic interest or natural beauty is still relevant today. In 1883 she wrote: "...I think we want four things. Places to sit in, places to play in, places to stroll in, and places to spend a day in."

Octavia Hill first coined the term "Green Belt" in 1875. CPRE was responsible for the creation of Green Belts in 1938 – the Cambridge Green Belt was established in 1992. It was designed to prevent urban sprawl and promote redevelopment of brownfield sites in Cambridge city.

In theory the Green Belt is protected by national planning policy; however, we believe that the Cambridge Green Belt is under attack as never before. In recent years land has been released to allow a number of developments, and this

piecemeal approach – which relies on cars and increases energy use – results in the loss of precious countryside and the destruction of agricultural land and wildlife. And it's not just about causing irreversible damage: it's about heeding the reality of climate change and acknowledging the role of the Green Belt in biodiversity and food security. CPRE's State of the Green Belt report finds that the Green Belt is being overlooked as a key solution to climate change, the decline of nature and food security vulnerabilities. The report argues the Green Belt, which protects 12.5% of England's land area from development, should become greener, wetter and more biodiverse: so why destroy it?

We think Octavia Hill would support our campaign to stop urban sprawl and low-density development outside the city boundaries and to protect our Green Belt and the many benefits it gives us.

To find out more about the Cambridge Green Belt and the threats it faces see <https://www.cprecamb.org.uk/cpre-news/2023/08/17/cambridge-university-educator-or-developer/>.