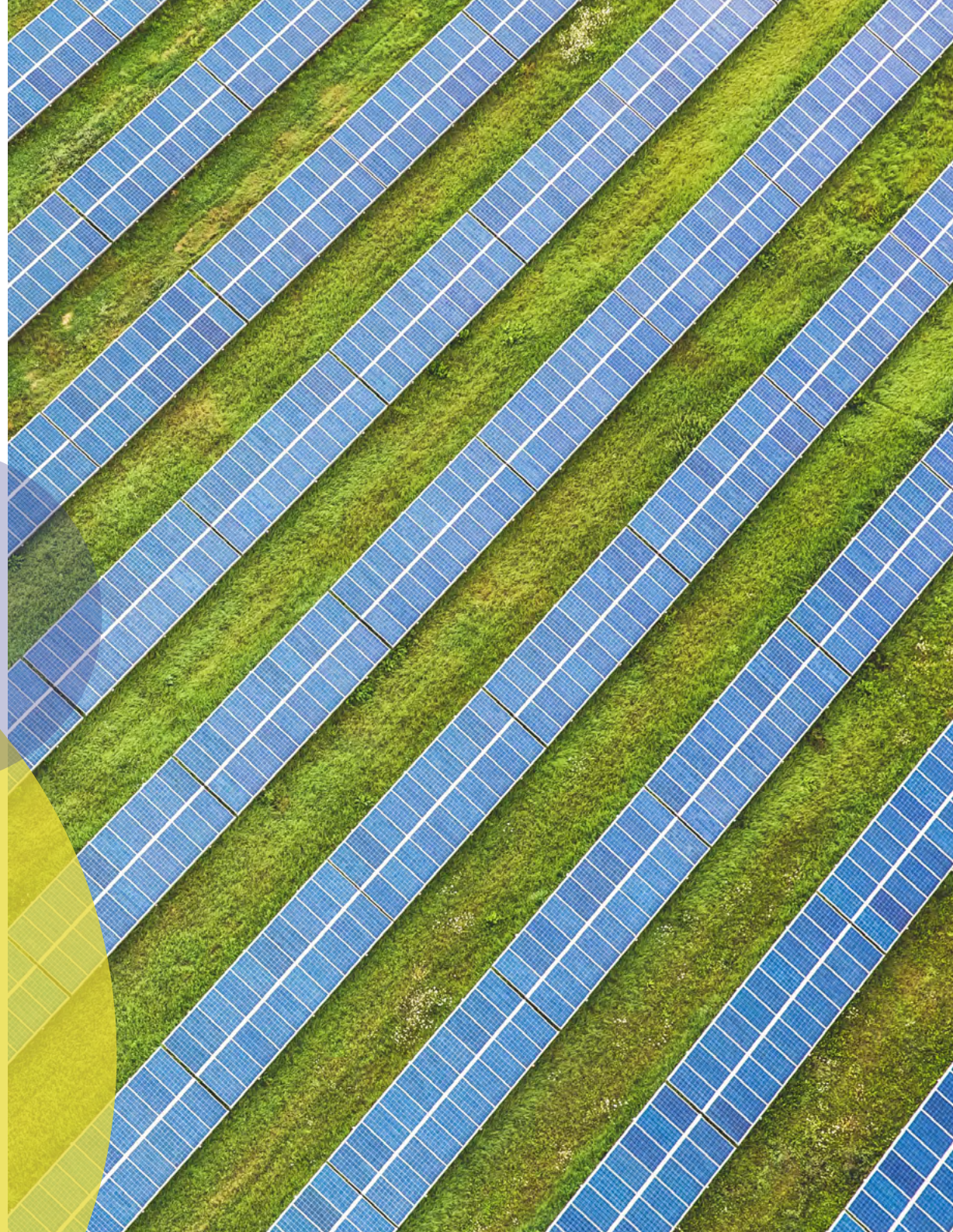




Tophams Solar

Bringing clean energy and
local environmental benefits





Tophams Solar

At Pathfinder Clean Energy, we have recently submitted a planning application for a new solar farm on land off Ashwell Road, north of Bygrave, known as Tophams Field.

The project will play a crucial role in ensuring energy security for homes and businesses in North Hertfordshire and beyond, which will help to reduce reliance on increasingly uncertain imported fossil fuels.

It will support the transition to a clean, sustainable, low carbon future, providing enough power for over 15,700 homes. It will help to reduce carbon emissions by 11,300 tonnes per year - equivalent to removing the emissions from 2,450 family cars. The site has been carefully selected. We considered a wide range of options across the region, but Tophams was chosen because it can be easily connected to the electricity grid, the site is outside the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural

Beauty, and it would not affect any ancient woodland or protected species.

We have a long term vision for Tophams Solar, which will not only help North Hertfordshire to meet its ambition to become net zero by 2030, but will also significantly enhance local wildlife, retain agricultural land use and make new areas of community space available.

We are determined to be a good neighbour, and have already undertaken community consultation which led us to make changes to our proposal, including increased tree planting and moving the proposed solar panels further from local homes. We intend to continue talking to local people and are actively discussing ways that we can enhance benefits for local communities, in addition to delivering on-site environmental improvements.

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About Pathfinder Clean Energy

Pathfinder Clean Energy is a UK company with a successful track record of developing solar projects across the UK. We have a vision to develop solar energy projects that meet the UK's rapidly growing need for clean electricity, while working with communities to maximise positive local impacts for wildlife and for people. We are committed to that vision, and have a team including ecologists, landscape and heritage specialists who help ensure our proposals can deliver long term benefits.

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A message from Alex Ross

Pathfinder Clean Energy was established five years ago to take action at a local level to reduce carbon emissions and support the transition away from burning imported fossil fuels in power stations, homes and cars.

The need for new renewable power is becoming increasingly urgent. Rapidly increasing costs of gas are affecting everyone's bills, and the international supply of energy becoming more and more unpredictable. The UK must become more self-sufficient in energy, and that will require a significant number of new clean energy projects across the whole country.

As a company we have focussed on solar power because we believe that producing clean energy must not be at the expense of people, wildlife and biodiversity.

Unlike other sources of clean energy, solar panels are safe, practically silent, produce no emissions, enable agricultural activity to continue, and create improved habitats for plants and animals.

North Hertfordshire has rightly declared a climate emergency and set ambitious targets to become net zero by 2030. We agree with and support the ambition. Tophams Solar can make a significant contribution to these goals, along with planting new trees, hedges and wildflower meadows, and establishing new habitats for birds, bats and insects.

Although we believe Tophams Solar is both necessary, and appropriate, I do understand that not everyone will welcome our proposals. Change is always concerning, we appreciate that, and there will be impacts as a result of our proposed development.

However, we have worked extremely hard to identify the best possible location for a solar farm. That process included talking to a wide range of stakeholders, including wildlife and heritage groups, and local residents, to find ways to improve our proposals. We have taken onboard that feedback and have made changes to our project to eliminate negative impacts to the greatest degree possible, and to maximise the local community and environmental benefits.

We are determined to be a good neighbour and are making a long term commitment to the maintenance of this site, so that the environmental improvements we make on day one, can flourish into the future.

We also want to keep talking to our neighbours. We are continually looking for new ways to help the local community, and are open to suggestions for ways we can support local initiatives.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and please do contact us directly if you have any questions or suggestions.



Alex Ross
Director of Pathfinder Clean Energy

Generating environmental benefits alongside clean energy



Generating energy to **power 15,700 homes** every year – enough to power the equivalent of Bygrave, Ashwell, Baldock and three quarters of Letchworth Garden City



Displaces 11,300 tonnes of CO2 which would be added to the atmosphere every year, equivalent to removing the emissions from 2,450 family cars.



1.45km of new hedge planting on site



60% increase in hedgerow habitat and **60% increase in overall habitat** on the site



On-site battery storage, holding any excess energy generated and releasing it back to the grid at times of high demand, helping to increase energy security



No loss of agricultural land, and the site will be fully restored after solar panels are removed



Improving soil quality in overworked fields



Reducing soil erosion through addition of grasslands



Helping farmers to diversify their income and ensure continued viability of the farm



Providing new community open space, adjacent to existing Public Right of Way

Responding to local suggestions

As well as producing urgently needed clean energy, Tophams Solar will deliver a wide range of benefits for local people and the environment. We have also listened to local people and stakeholders to understand ways that we can enhance these benefits, and reduce any negative impacts.

Created a wide corridor along the bridleway, including screening to reduce visual impact and create new habitats.

A new community area in the south west of the site, adjacent to the Public Right of Way

Removed rows of solar panels close to properties in the southern section of the site to reduce views from Ashwell Road and from the north west of the site

Solar panels have been set 9m back from northern boundary along Cat Ditch following advice from the Internal Drainage Board

Re-located the battery storage within the site to reduce visual impact

Changed the type of perimeter fencing, based on feedback from British Horse Society and local residents

Introduced wildlife gates in fencing to allow for wildlife migration across the site

Increased levels of tree planting to improve visual screening, including a new copse/wooded area up to 8m in height adjacent to Bygrave

Understanding and reducing visual impact

We have worked very hard to identify, minimise or eliminate all impacts of the solar farm wherever possible. However, we recognise and appreciate that it is impossible and unrealistic to completely remove the visual impact.

Nevertheless, we have taken a number of measures to reduce the visual impact as far as possible.



▲ Revised fencing style

1

We have positioned the solar panels 5-9m lower in elevation than existing properties, and will follow the contours of the land to reduce the impact on properties in Bygrave

2

Several rows of solar panels have been removed from the south eastern corner of the site, adjacent to Ashwell Road

3

We re-sited the battery storage within the site to reduce visual impact

4

New hedgerows will be planted along the eastern edge of the site to reduce visibility from Ashwell Road

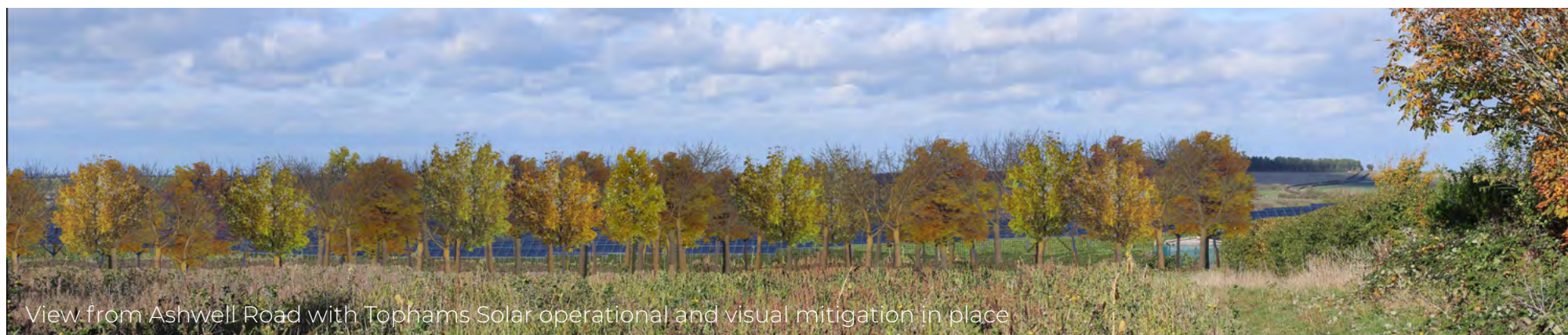
5

The style of site fencing has been changed to be more in keeping with the surrounding area



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Frequently asked questions

From our local consultation and engagement a number of questions have been raised. We have tried to answer them here:



Are solar projects necessary?

Yes, to meet local and national net zero targets we need to move away from imported fossil fuels which are increasingly expensive and unpredictable, as well as being damaging for both the environment and human health.

Solar balances wind power, helping to provide a consistent supply of energy when the wind doesn't blow. Solar energy can be delivered far quicker than other forms of renewables, such as offshore wind, helping to achieve North Hertfordshire's target of becoming net zero by 2030, and meeting growing demand for electricity to power things like electric cars.



Couldn't we just develop rooftop solar or brownfield sites?

No, to meet the transition away from fossil fuels we need both. We need projects like Tophams Solar, as rooftop and brownfield solar schemes alone will not produce enough energy. Relying solely on small scale solar schemes would have a significant impact on energy bills.



Can't you use another form of energy generation?

Other forms of energy generation are available, but all of these would cause more environmental damage locally, and on a permanent basis. Solar projects are temporary, and deliver substantial local environmental biodiversity improvements with lots of new habitats created including wildflower meadows, hedgerows, bird, bat and insect nests.



Is Tophams Field the right site?

Yes, Tophams Field is a really well suited site for solar. We looked at a wide range of options across the local region, and this was the best option our specialist team could identify. It is close to a connection to the electricity grid and sits outside of the greenbelt and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Crucially any environmental impacts can be managed on the site, without impacting on any protected species or ancient woodlands. In fact the site offers us an opportunity to significantly increase biodiversity, planting large numbers of new trees, hedgerows and meadows, while allowing ongoing agricultural use of the land.



Have you listened to local people?

Yes, we conducted a programme of consultation late last year where we spoke to large numbers of local people, as well as community representatives, and heritage and wildlife organisations. We received a wide range of feedback, with a number of local people in support of the project, while other people clearly have concerns. We have done our best to consider and respond to those issues, including by relocating the solar panels further away from local houses, increasing the amount of mature planting and doing more to enhance local habitats.



Will the solar farm be a large scale industrial complex?

No, we are doing everything we can to ensure the solar farm is sympathetic to the local environment. This includes careful mature planting and habitat creation, sympathetic low impact fencing and creation of new open space to create wildlife

habitats and for community use. The solar panels will be under three meters tall and will not include tall lighting columns. The solar farm will also connect to the electricity grid via underground cables, meaning overhead cables will not be required. Once operational, there will be little to no traffic visiting the site.



Will the solar farm have a lasting negative impact on local farmland?

No, the project has a lifespan of 40 years, after which the land will be returned to full farming use. The site makes up just 0.4% of farmland in North Hertfordshire, and during operation, the field will remain available for animal grazing and still be in agricultural use.

Our plans would also increase biodiversity by 148%, providing a local environmental benefit whilst also generating renewable energy.



Will the solar farm have a serious impact on local heritage?

No, we have conducted a thorough archaeological survey of the site and have worked extensively with heritage stakeholders to reduce any impacts on local historical sites. In consultation with Historic England we remove several rows of panels to reduce how much can be seen from the north west of the site.



Will you disappear once the farm is built?

We intend to be a good neighbor. We will hold a long term interest in Tophams Solar over its 40 year lifespan. As such, we are actively building relationships with the local community and stakeholders. We intend to continue talking to local people and are actively discussing ways that we can enhance benefits for local communities, as well as the environment, over the lifetime of the project.

Contact Us

If you have any questions or would like to discuss our application, please contact us on:

Phone: **0800 377 7348**

Email: **communityrelations@pacesolar.co.uk**