



We care for the Chilterns

## **Planning Guidance Statement on Solar Panels**

(Reviewed 2018)

The Society is generally supportive of solar power. Opportunities should be maximised for installation of solar panels on roofs, especially on new-build, which provides greatest opportunity to minimise visual impact and maximise operational efficiency through good design.

Retro-fit on existing buildings will also normally be acceptable, as long as it does not adversely affect a listed building or its setting, or have an adverse impact on the character of a Conservation Area or any other location where local character is significantly influenced by the quality of the built environment. However, even in these situations, innovative solutions, for example the use of individual solar tiles, may successfully overcome these issues.

Self-standing panel installations for domestic use will only be acceptable if no suitable roof-mounted alternative is available, and there is no adverse visual impact affecting public viewpoints, or associated adverse impacts on trees or other habitats of ecological importance.

Large-scale commercial solar farms (i.e. field-scale arrays of self-standing panels) within, or affecting the setting of the AONB, should be objected to. Whether a proposal affects the setting of the AONB is a matter of judgement, derived from a combination of scale, materials, distance from AONB, prominence from significant viewpoints, existing appearance of site and surroundings – but simply being in line of sight does not on its own constitute an effect on setting.

Large-scale commercial solar farms within the Green Belt should also be objected to, because of their impact on openness.

Outside of the Green Belt, AONB and its setting, large-scale commercial solar farms may be acceptable, but the Planning Group should have regard to the following considerations when formulating its comments on such applications:

1. Panels should be mounted as close to existing ground levels as possible, and no higher than 2-3 metres above existing ground level. Resist any significant changes to ground levels or the creation of 'made up' ground that might alter the natural contours of the landscape.
2. The erection of any associated pylons and grid connectors associated with the solar panels should not be encouraged. Therefore 'below ground' connection should be achieved so that the open countryside is not harmed by tall unsightly pylons, cables, and related equipment.
3. Use natural camouflage for security fences by keeping the panels themselves at lowest possible levels and use bush cover to soften the impact of site boundaries. High level security fencing will likely be seen as harmful to the open countryside.

4. A landscaping scheme should be required that covers the whole of the site area and addresses landscape and visual impacts, derived from a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment covering the impact on landscape character and views to and from the site. Landscaping proposals should be included to mitigate for the environmental impacts identified.
5. Top grade farming land should be avoided for solar farms. Land grade should be stated on applications. If it is not, then Planning Field Officers should raise this point (and question land grade) when commenting on individual schemes. Low-grade agricultural land should be encouraged. There may be opportunities to continue grazing between the panels.
6. Applications should avoid constructing new tarmac (or other hard surfaced) access tracks. Sites should be serviceable by agricultural vehicles so that, if not required for solar farms in the future, the land can be more easily returned to agriculture.
7. In a similar way the land used for the panels itself should be easy to restore for agriculture if solar farms close in the future. Therefore the use of removeable pile driven and screw foundations should be encouraged and the use of substantial areas of hardstanding or extensive concrete bases for the solar panels should be opposed.
8. Materials used on solar farms should be carefully assessed if sited close to airfields due to the potential introduction of any distracting glare.
9. Account should be taken of issues of intrusive daytime glare, especially if within proximity to protected locations such as listed buildings, ancient monuments, and conservation areas. The choice of materials for the panels and the frames can help to reduce landscape and visual impact, and glint and glare.