AMPYR Solar Europe

# Introduction

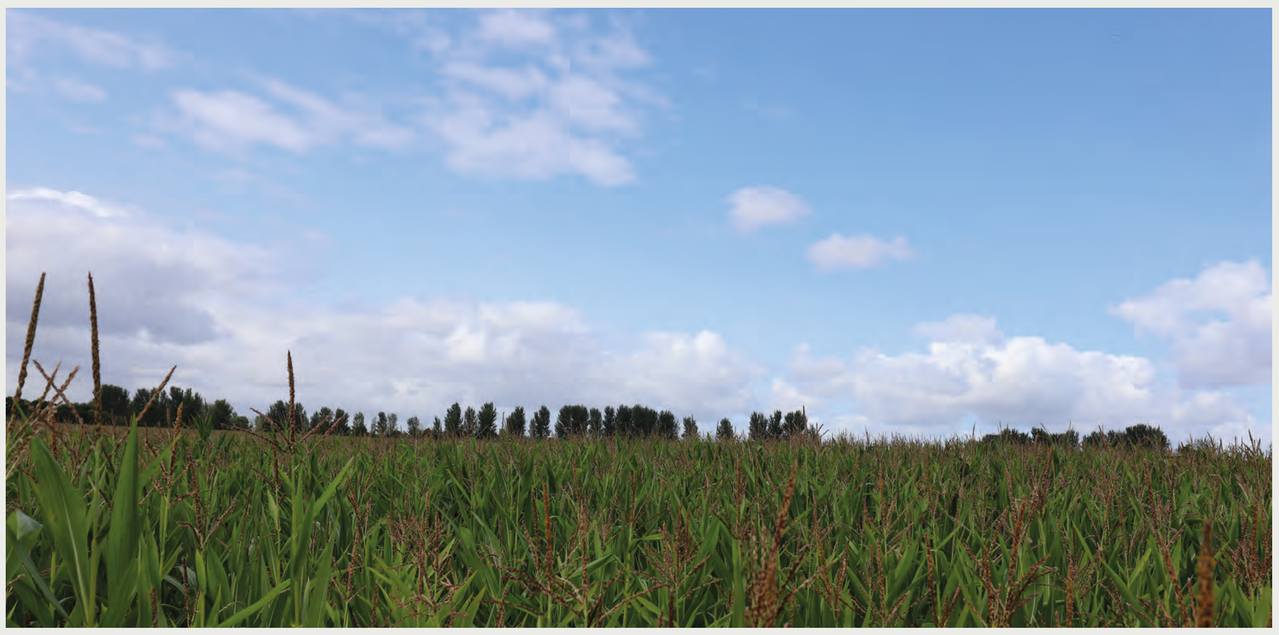
**Welcome to our consultation on the proposed solar development at North Newton.**

Ampyr Solar Europe (Ampyr) are developing a proposal for a solar farm with a generating capacity of 30MW, on 57 hectares of land immediately south of North Newton.

The proposed site would connect to the national electricity transmission network ('the grid'), approximately 2km to the north of the proposed development.

The solar farm would generate enough electricity to supply approximately 13,000 homes a year, saving 400,000 tonnes of $CO_2$ over its 40-year lifespan.

We undertake thorough assessments of potential locations to select sites that both work operationally and have a minimal impact on the community and the environment.



*Summer view of the site*

*Winter view of the site*


*The proposed solar farm layout and design*

# What will it look like?

We have considered how the solar farm will fit into the landscape and how we can minimise visual effects on the community and impacts on local wildlife.

We are mindful of situating the development carefully, to reduce any impact on both the environment and the community. This board explains how the solar farm may look, as well as how the solar panels would work.

**Height:** The development will range from 0.6m in height at the base of the panel, to no more than 2.5m above the ground. A substation and control centre (approximately 6m tall) will be situated in the southwest corner of the central field. A 15m high communication mast will also be located within the substation area.

**Screening:** Where possible, we will plant new hedges and native shrubs along the borders of the site, in addition to enhancing the existing hedgerows. Increased plant life both screens the development from external views and provides enriched habitats for wildlife. The landscaping plan - informed by a formal Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment - will be submitted with our planning application.

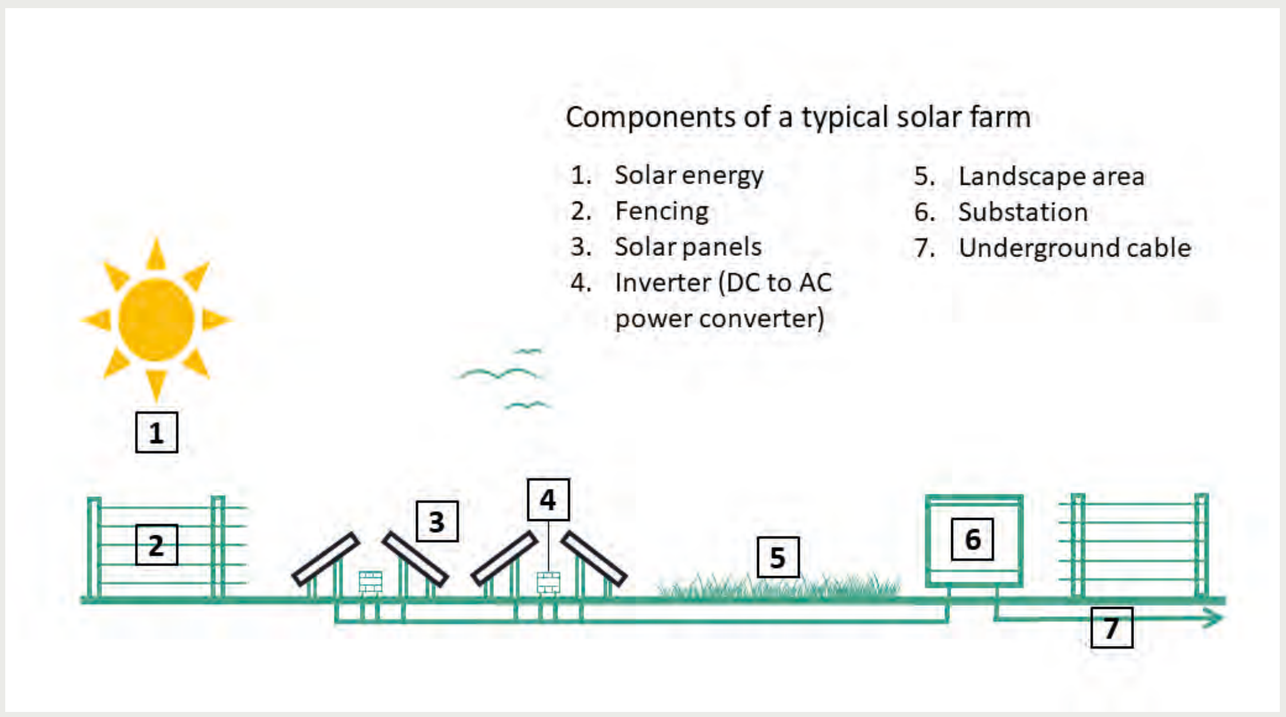
# How solar farms work

Solar panels are made of photovoltaic cells, which is why generating electricity with solar panels is also called solar PV. These cells convert the sun's energy into electricity.

Photovoltaic cells are encased between layers of semi-conducting materials such as silicone. Each layer has different electronic properties that energise when hit by photons from sunlight, creating an electric field – this process is called the *photoelectric effect*.

Solar panels generate a Direct Current of electricity, which is passed through an inverter to convert it into an Alternating Current. The Alternating Current is then either fed into the National Grid or sent directly to large local power users.

Solar panels need daylight and sunshine, and the sun's rays are powerful enough to travel through fog and cloud. Solar panels function very well in the South West and contribute significantly to reducing carbon emissions and to the UK's Net Zero Strategy.




*How solar farms work to generate sustainable electricity from sunlight*

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# Environment

**We carefully consider our impact on the environment. We are surveying the area to make sure we understand any effects that the proposed solar farm may have.**

Some of the key environmental features and conditions within and around the site are shown on this board.

We are undertaking surveys to assess North Newton Solar Farm's likely effects on the environment, landscape, heritage and local community.

We are required to deliver a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through habitat enhancement on-site. It is currently expected that this target can be substantially exceeded - on similar projects, we have achieved well over 100% BNG.

We are committed to enhancing local ecology and biodiversity through this project.

*Birds flying over a solar array*

## Ecology, biodiversity and conservation

Conserving and enhancing the biodiversity is a priority for us. Our comprehensive surveys are currently undertaken to provide an excellent understanding of the wildlife and habitats at the site. Once the surveys are complete, we will create and carry out mitigation measures to minimise any impact on the local ecology, wildlife, or habitats.

The site will feature a combination of solar panels and ecological enhancements to increase the site's biodiversity.

Some options we are considering include:

- Planting over 1,300m new native hedgerows
- Seeding 53 hectares of grassland - the area between, beneath and around the solar panels - with a seed mix of native grasses, herbs and sedges
- Planting around a hectare of mixed native scrub
- Creating over 2 hectares of traditional orchard

The area underneath the panels can be used for grazing sheep to create a varied height, which further increases the biodiversity value.

There are no nature conservation sites of international importance within 2km of the site.

We have considered sites outside of the project area – particularly Hestercombe House Special Area of Conservation and Somerset Levels & Moors Ramsar - however their distance from the site means that an ecological impact on these conservation areas is very unlikely.

We are undertaking an Ecological Impact Assessment and a Habitat Regulations Assessment, which will be submitted to Somerset Council with the planning application.

*Farmers may use the grassland under solar panels for sheep grazing*

*We will enhance the existing hedgerows*

## Agriculture

Solar developments on Grade 1 agricultural land are considered by Local Planning Authorities, who carefully weigh the benefits of climate change adaptation, energy security and sustainable energy production against any potential impact on food production.

Although it is not possible to farm arable crops on the land under solar farms, there are many other uses for the area that contribute to land regeneration and food sources for livestock.

The land requires little maintenance, allowing it time to regenerate. The natural grasses seeded underneath the panel enrich the soil with valuable nutrients.

After 40 years, the solar farm will be decommissioned and the land returned to agricultural use. It is expected that the soil condition will be much improved following four decades of sensitive land management.

Farmers often use solar sites as grazing land - the panels provide shade for sheep. This only requires a slightly altered grazing regime and balances the biodiversity benefits of a wildlife meadow with supporting livestock. We are working with the current landowner to investigate this option for North Newton Solar Farm.

The biggest threat to farmland, food security and rural communities is the climate crisis (Department of Energy Security and Net Zero, 2024). Solar farms contribute to climate change mitigation by reducing $CO_2$ emissions.

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**We have undertaken a comprehensive suite of surveys to identify and mitigate any impacts that the development may have on the environment and the community.**

**These assessments will be available to view on Somerset Council's Public Access when we submit the application.**

### Flora and fauna

- Bats
- Dormice
- Great Crested Newts
- Breeding Birds
- Trees and arboriculture
- Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening

### Environmental reports

- Environmental Impact Assessment including Ecology; Landscape and Visual Characteristics; Cultural Heritage and Archaeology; and Soils and Agricultural Land Quality effects.
- Biodiversity Net Gain Metric
- Agricultural Land Classification Survey
- Geophysical Survey

### Infrastructure and services

- Flood Risk Assessment
- Surface Water Drainage Strategy
- Traffic Survey
- Road Safety Audit and Designer's Response
- Transport Statement

### Community

- Noise Assessment
- Air Quality Assessment
- Glint and Glare Assessment
- Site Selection Report
- Heritage Assessment

## Noise

The solar panels will not make any noise.

Low levels of noise can be generated by the electrical system, such as from the transformers and inverters. They can sound like a quiet buzz or fan noise, decreasingly rapidly with distance.

The transformers and inverters will be located away from nearby properties, at a distance confirmed by acoustic specialists and assessment. Detailed noise modelling will confirm any likely noise impacts on surrounding communities, and no noise impacts are anticipated.

Solar farm construction is efficient, as significant digging is not required. Any potential effects of noise and vibration during construction will be limited to specific locations within the site and will only occur for short periods of time.

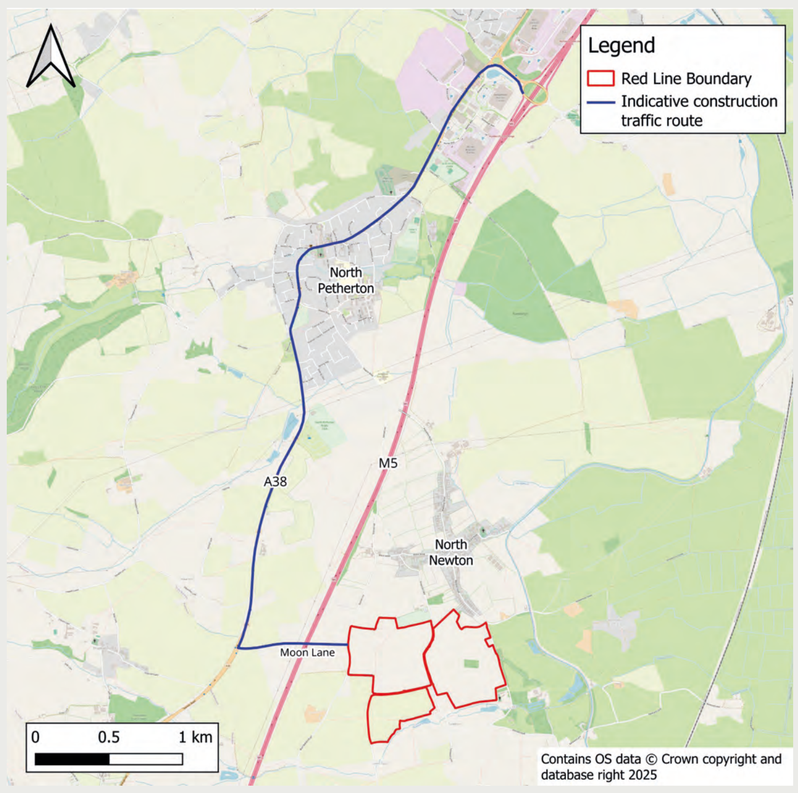
We will make the community aware when the works are likely to take place and details of our working hours will be set out in the planning application.

## Traffic

During construction, there will be increased traffic while materials are delivered to the site.

Access will be from the west via the A38 and a short stretch of Moon Lane.

To minimise vehicle movements around North Newton, we will work with the Council to create a new junction between Moon Lane and Brook Street.




*Proposed construction routing and access for the scheme*

Temporary traffic controls could be introduced to reduce potential adverse impacts on the road network – subject to agreement with the Local Highways Authority. This would likely remove the need for any carriageway widening or potential impacts on established hedgerows.

When the site becomes operational, the only vehicle movements around the site will be small maintenance vehicles attending less than once a week, and monitoring visits which will take place around four times a year using a car or van.

*Solar panel assembly and maintenance*

## Flooding

The site has a low risk of flooding. The site is in Environment Agency Flood Zone 1 - the lowest risk of flooding, and all key infrastructure is located away from any potential surface water ponding areas. The solar panels are also elevated above the ground by at least 0.6m, meaning they would be protected from any potential flooding.

As part of our planning application, we will submit a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy. The development is designed to not elevate flood risk, nor affect flood risk elsewhere. It will also demonstrate how any residual risk of flooding/surface water runoff will be managed.

## Heritage

There are no heritage sites within the proposed development's boundaries.

It is unlikely that the proposal would have any direct impact on the heritage in the surrounding area.

There are several Listed Buildings in the area:

- The Church of St Michael (Grade II Listed) adjacent to the site boundary.
- Maunsel House (Grade II* listed) and its associated buildings (Grade II Listed)
- Coxhill Bridge, public road bridge (Grade II Listed) on Middlemoor Drive.
- King's House, 17th century house (Grade II Listed).
- Derelict House adjacent to Roadside at Lower Rydon Farm (Grade II Listed).

It is unlikely that the development will have an adverse impact.

As part of the planning application, we are including a Heritage Assessment to identify any potential effects on the setting and character of these sites. We have undertaken surveys on the land to identify the potential for undiscovered archaeological remains and will do further archaeological evaluation on the advice of Somerset Council's archaeologist.

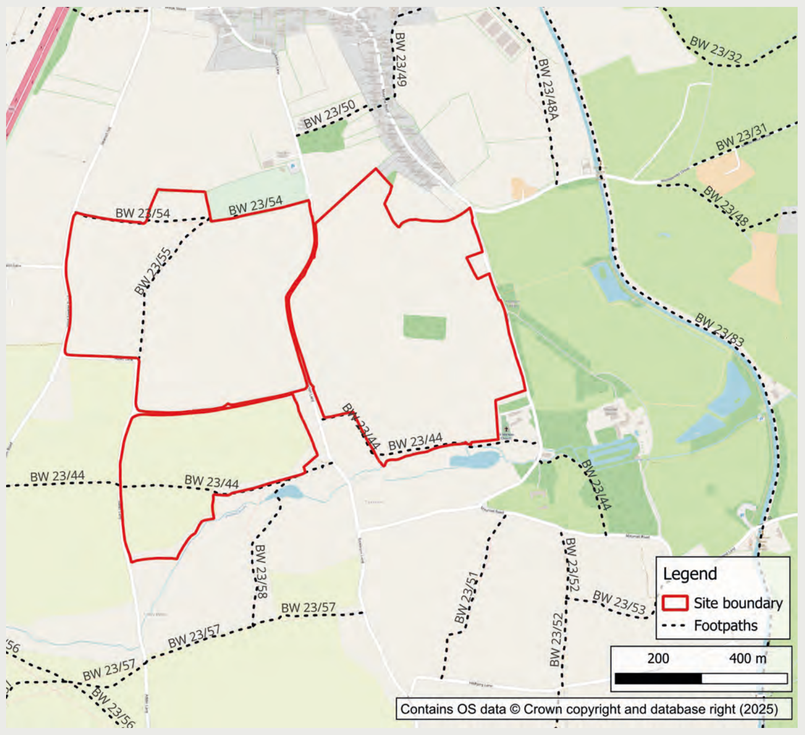
## Public Rights of Way

We will minimise any disruption to the Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) close to the site.

- PRoW BW 23/54 runs along the northern boundary
- PRoW BW 23/55 crosses the northwestern field
- PRoW BW 23/44 crosses the southwestern field
- PRoW 23/44 runs adjacent to the southern boundary of the eastern field, with a short section crossing the corner of the site

All routes will be retained and remain open during construction and operation. We will plant additional hedgerows where screening would be beneficial.

The internal temporary access track used during construction will cross PRoW23/55 – we will provide signage to allow safe crossings for users of this Public Right of Way.




*Public Rights of Way*

www.northnewtonsolar.co.uk

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# Community benefits

**We are committed to being transparent with our plans, facilitating community feedback, and then incorporating your views into our plans where at all possible and practical.**

We are investing in the community – we will operate a Community Benefit Fund, which becomes available once the solar farm is connected to the National Grid. We also seek to source staff and suppliers from Somerset wherever possible.

Should Somerset Council accept our planning submission, we will begin discussions with the community and elected representatives to seek views on the most impactful way to use the fund.

We are eager to hear your views on uses for the fund, even at this early stage.

The fund can be used to support local projects and initiatives, or even to establish a community electricity cooperative which Ampyr would support and guide.

*We plan to plant traditional orchards*

## Decommissioning

The development will not be permanent, with an initial operational period of 40 years. At the end of the development's lifespan, the site will be decommissioned with the land returned to the landowner in a state ready for arable use.

## Next steps

We are currently undertaking surveys and assessments, which will inform our proposal alongside the outputs from this consultation. We will then submit a planning application to Somerset Council.

Once the planning application is submitted, Somerset Council will host a statutory consultation. You will be able to see all the submitted assessments and comment directly to the council. At this point, we will also share an update with the local community on how feedback has influenced our proposal.

# Feedback Form

This consultation is running until 23:59 on 15th September 2025.
It is your opportunity to shape our proposal before we submit a planning application.

We welcome your feedback – scan the QR code

or go to **www.northnewtonsolar.co.uk/consultation**