Meeting Place

Statement of community involvement

Hob Lane Solar Farm, Cheshire

Hob Lane Solar Farm Ltd

April 2025

Contents

1. Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out the consultation and engagement that Belltown Power has undertaken, on behalf of Hob Lane Solar Farm Ltd, with local residents and other stakeholders on plans for a 30MWac solar farm on land north and south of Rake Lane, Dunham-on-the-Hill. This document demonstrates how Belltown Power has met and exceeded pre-application consultation guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework and Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWCC) SCI.

This SCI gives an overview of all consultation activity undertaken prior to the submission of the planning application alongside outlining how the plans have responded to feedback from the local community and other stakeholders.

Belltown Power is committed to ongoing engagement throughout the planning process and ensured that the community was made aware of the proposals and had multiple avenues to find out more and share their feedback. Belltown Power will continue to engage throughout the determination process and beyond.

This report has been prepared on behalf of Belltown Power by Meeting Place, a specialist in stakeholder engagement in relation to planning and development issues.

2. Consultation requirements

Sustainability and community involvement is central to CWCC's planning process. Community involvement is at the forefront of national planning policy and is noted in the revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024).

The revised NPPF highlights that early engagement has "significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties". It also indicates that good quality pre-application discussion "enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community".

CWCC's Statement of Community Involvement (2022) outlines the council's expectations on how the local community should be involved during the pre-application process. It encourages developers "to carry out independent public consultations prior to the submission of schemes, providing the community with an early opportunity to become involved in proposals for their area. This could take the form of public exhibitions, meetings workshops or media coverage etc. Results from any public consultation exercise undertaken by the applicant should form part of the application."

The SCI emphasises the council's desire to see all sections of the community shape new development proposals within the area and indicates that effective pre-application engagement and consultation is central to achieving this.

2.1 Our response to the consultation requirements

Belltown Power is seeking to create a 30MWac solar farm on land to the northwest of Dunham-on-the-Hill in a way that respects the area's character and supports its goals in achieving net zero carbon emissions. Belltown Power recognises the importance of involving the community and a wide range of other stakeholders and so has provided multiple avenues for engagement.

In response to national and local guidance as well as Belltown Power's desire to design the right plans for the area, activities have included:

- Meetings and ongoing engagement with political and community representatives.
- Opportunities for near neighbours to meet with the team individually.
- Community letter with an enclosed feedback form sent to local addresses.
- Dedicated website with an online version of the feedback form.
- Engagement with the local media.
- Community webinar.
- Dedicated email address, freephone telephone number and freepost address.

These elements and the feedback received are detailed in the following sections.

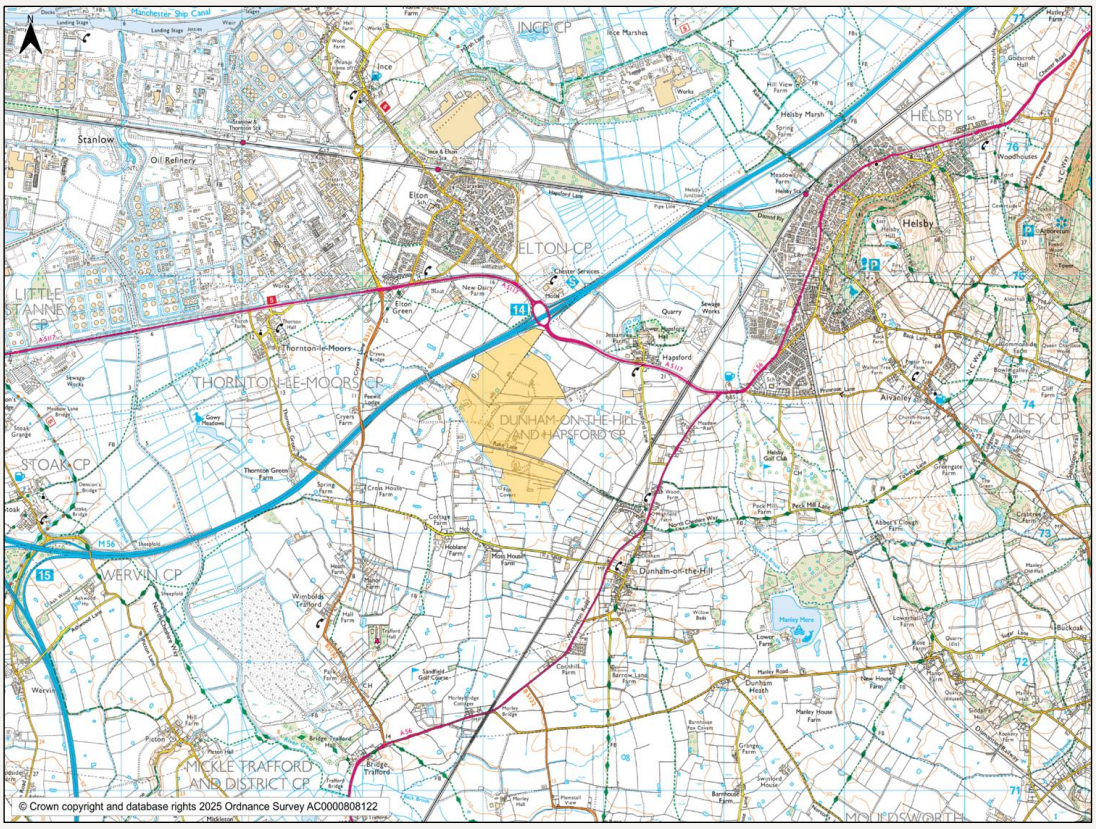
3. What is proposed?

3.1 About Belltown Power

Belltown Power is an established UK based clean energy company at the leading edge of renewables project development in the UK. Founded in 2013 by a team of highly experienced renewable energy professionals, Belltown Power has successfully delivered over 20 projects totalling over 200 MW of wind, solar and hydropower capacity across the UK.

3.2 Site location

This site, situated to the northwest of Dunham-on-the-Hill, has been thoughtfully chosen to generate clean, renewable energy while enhancing biodiversity, ecology and supporting the local community. The land is classified as predominantly Grade 3b agricultural land, which is not considered best and most versatile (BMV). The proposal is for a temporary solar farm, expected to operate for 40 years before being fully decommissioned.



3.3 Proposals

Belltown Power is bringing forward an application for a 30MWac solar farm on land to the northwest of Dunham-on-the-Hill alongside associated infrastructure and biodiversity and ecology measures. The proposed 30MWac solar farm would be able to generate enough green energy to meet the annual energy needs of approximately 13,000 homes, across 40 years before being fully decommissioned. During this time, the land would maintain its

greenfield classification and at the end of its lifespan, all infrastructure would be removed and the site can be restored to its original use.

Key features of the site include:

- 30 MWac solar farm, able to generate enough green energy to meet the annual energy needs of approximately 13,000 homes. The site extent covers 200 acres, of which 120 acres would be used for panels with the rest used by existing hedgerows and ponds and proposed biodiversity enhancements.
- The ability for continued agricultural use, such as sheep grazing, once the site is operational.
- Ecological benefits including enhanced hedgerows, new wildflower meadows and active grassland management.
- A biodiversity net gain well over the national requirement of 10%.
- Outdoor classroom with picnic areas for local schools to use and enjoy on educational site visits.
- Genuine benefits for local residents including a community benefit and education fund of £600,000 over the project's lifetime.

4. Engagement

This section details Belltown Power's extensive programme of engagement with the local community and key stakeholders.

4.1 Stakeholder meetings

Early meetings were sought with political stakeholders to provide an overview on plans and understand their initial feedback. The following were contacted:

- Councillor Louise Gittins – Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Councillor Karen Shore – Deputy Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council
- Councillor Margaret Parker – Gowy Rural ward member
- Councillor Graham Heatley – Gowy Rural ward member
- Councillor Hugo Deynem – Sandstone ward member
- Dunham-on-the-Hill Parish Council
- Thornton Le Moors Parish Council
- Elton Parish Council

Meetings were successfully organised with:

- Councillor Louise Gittins' representatives (Will Pearson and Tamara Hunt) – 17 March 2025
- Dunham-on-the-Hill and Hapsford Parish Council – 1 April 2025

4.2 Near neighbour meetings

In recognition of potential individual concerns, the five closest neighbouring addresses to the site were invited to meet with the team one-on-one. A copy of the letter sent to these households can be found at **Appendix 1**.

At this time, no households have requested a meeting, but Belltown Power remains open to scheduling any future meetings with nearby neighbours if desired.

4.3 Community letter

A community letter was posted via Royal Mail to 292 addresses in a 1.25km radius of the site (pictured below) on 7 March 2025. The letter provided information on the proposed solar farm location, what the plans are and how much energy they would create. Feedback was encouraged through an enclosed feedback form easily returnable by a freepost envelope provided.

The letter also invited people to the community webinar and promoted the dedicated project website. Freephone, email and freepost details were included for people to contact the team.

A copy of the letter and feedback form is available at **Appendix 2**.

Community letter distribution area to 292 addresses surrounding the site

4.4 Project website

A dedicated project website, www.hoblanesolarfarm.com, was launched to act as an online hub of information on what is proposed and to provide channels for feedback. As of 30th March 2025, 37 people have visited the website and four people completed feedback forms online.

The website was launched to coincide with distribution of the community letter and press release. It includes information on Belltown Power, the site location and details on the project including how much energy the site would produce. A virtual public exhibition, including banners with details about the proposed site and visualisations from key viewpoints, is also available. A timeline for the proposed planning application is also included.

The website also invited people to, and included a link to register for, the community webinar. At the point of Planning submission, freephone, email and freepost details remain available for people to contact the team.

The website is designed to be easy to navigate and engaging and an online version of the feedback form enclosed with the community letter is also available on the website.

Images of the website can be found at **Appendix 3**.

4.5 Local media

The local media was contacted to raise awareness of the proposals and the consultation. A media release was issued to four local outlets – Capital North West and North Wales, Chester Standard, Cheshire Live and Chester's Dee Radio – coverage was subsequently secured in the Chester Standard and Chester Dee's Radio.

The press release issued to local media is available at **Appendix 4** and coverage received at **Appendix 5**.

4.6 Virtual briefing

A virtual briefing was held at 6pm on 24 March via Zoom. There were 11 attendees in total who asked around 40 questions to the team. Belltown Power is grateful to those that joined and hope they found the event insightful.

The webinar was advertised in the community letters sent out, on the website and in the press release that was featured in two news outlets.

4.7 Contact details

Ensuring people were able to get in touch with the team to ask any questions and make any comments was vital throughout the consultation period. All the consultation materials included the dedicated project contact details in the form of a freephone telephone number, email address and freepost mailing address. This helped to ensure that all residents, regardless of their access to digital technology, were able to correspond directly with a member of the project team.

The number, 0800 148 8911, and email address, hoblane@belltownpower.com, were staffed between 9am and 5:30pm from Monday to Friday. Both were answered and managed by a member of the Meeting Place team. The freepost mailing address was also managed by Meeting Place.

5. Feedback

This section summarises the feedback received through the paper based and online feedback form, webinar, email and freephone line. As expected, the feedback was minimal given the rural nature of the site.

5.1 Feedback summary

In total, eight people provided feedback via the online or paper-based feedback form. Four feedback forms were submitted online, and four were hard-copy forms received via freepost or email.

A number of themes were raised by respondents including the need for renewable energy and the visual impact the plans may have.

The following section provides a summary of the responses received with accompanying data visualisations. Verbatim responses to free text questions are provided in full at **Appendix 6.**

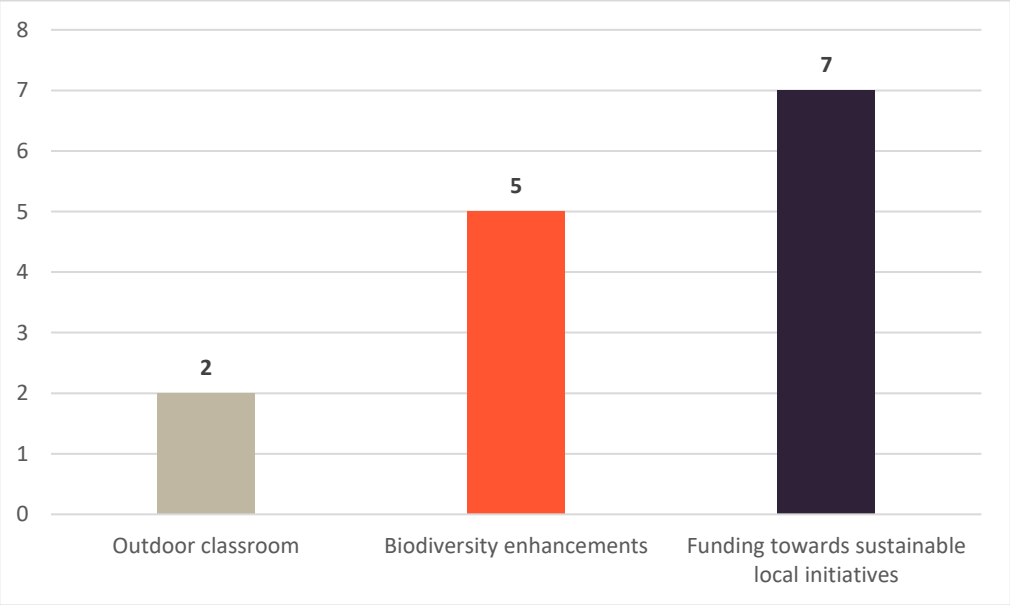
5.2 Feedback form

Q1. What is your relationship to the site?

All of the respondents indicated that they live close to the site, one respondent additionally added that they also visit the area.

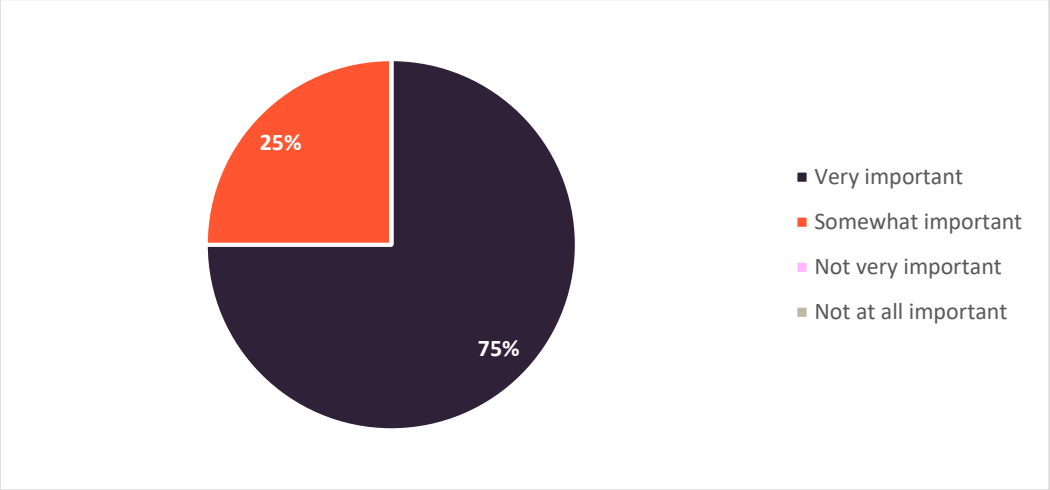
Q2. Our plans include a range of enhancements and new facilities. Which of these do you feel would benefit the local community?

Three options were provided for this question, with respondents able to select as many answers as they felt were applicable. There was support for all options, though "funding towards sustainable local initiatives" was the most popular response, with seven selections. This was followed by "biodiversity enhancements" (five selections) and lastly "outdoor classroom" (two selections).



Q3. As part of the proposals, the majority of the site will be able to be retained for agricultural use during the solar farm's lifetime. How important is this to you personally?

Respondents to the survey indicated that the proposals retaining the site's agricultural use during the solar farm's lifetime was of high importance to them. The question was answered by everyone who submitted a feedback form and all selections indicated it was very or somewhat important.



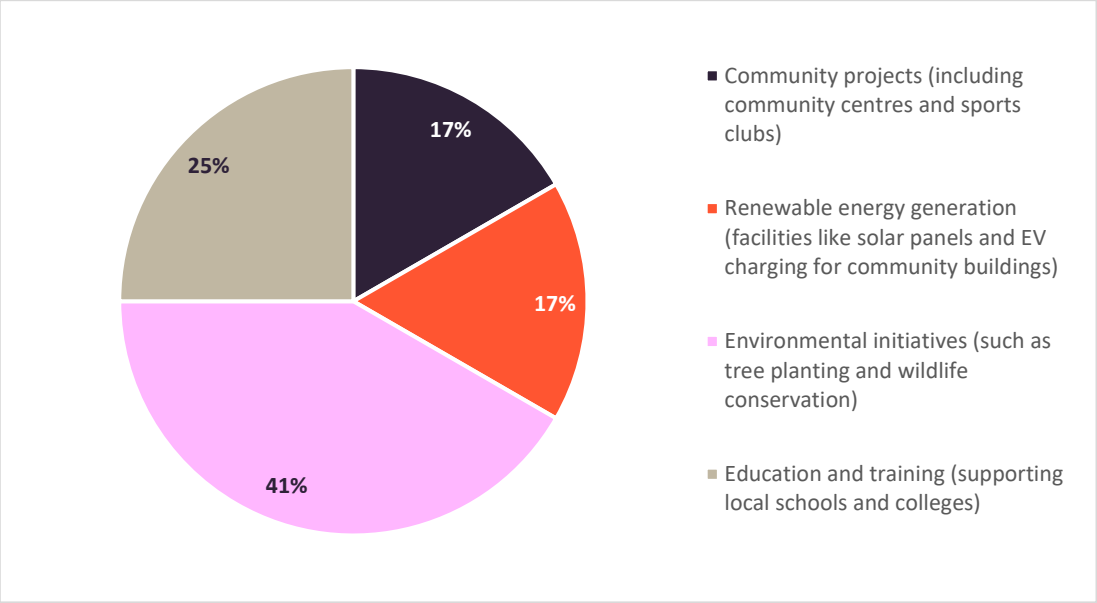
Q4. How important are the following aspects of the proposals to you?

We asked respondents to rank aspects of the proposals from the most to least important. 'Continuing agricultural use' was ranked the most important with 'improving biodiversity' ranked the least. Below is the average score of the rankings from highest to lowest:

- Continuing agricultural use – 4.5
- Creating new habitats for wildlife, including wildflower meadows – 4
- Planting around the site boundary – 3.75
- Delivering clean renewable energy – 3.63
- Improving biodiversity – 3.5

Q5. The plans include a community benefit fund that can help to support local initiatives. Which of the following do you think would be most beneficial to the community?

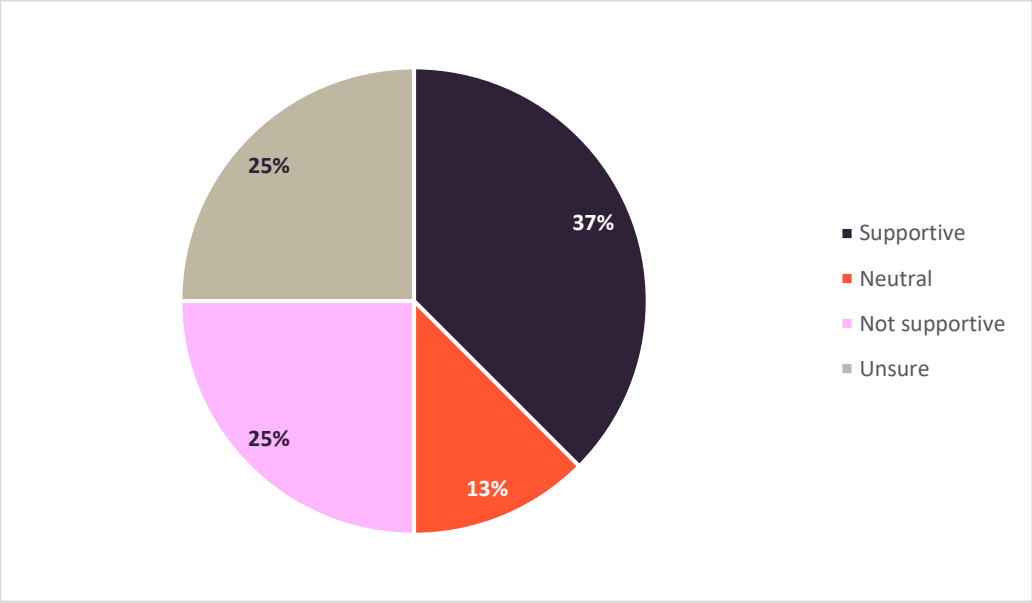
Of the available options, respondents indicated that 'environmental initiatives (such as tree planting and wildlife conservation)' would be the most beneficial to the community with five responses, whilst 'community projects (including community centres and sports clubs)' and 'renewable energy generation (facilities like solar panels and EV charging for community buildings)' were voted the least beneficial with two responses each.



Q6. Following on from the previous question, are there any particular initiatives or groups that you feel would benefit from funding?

The full extent of the answers to this question can be found in **Appendix 6.** A few key themes were raised in response to this question, such as support for funding for local schools and the village hall.

Q7. Thinking about our plans for Hob Lane Solar Farm, how do you feel about them at this stage?



Q8. If you are comfortable sharing, what are the reasons for your answer to the previous question about how you feel about the plans?

Some comments emphasised the desire for more time to review the proposal and involve local residents, indicating a need for further consultation and understanding before any decision is made. There was consistent concern about the visual appearance of the proposed solar farm, with people expressing worry that it will look unattractive or disrupt

the natural landscape. The access routes (e.g. Hob Lane), were raised, with some questioning the practicality and safety of using certain roads for construction traffic. Some respondents expressed distrust toward promises of future decommissioning, with some people fearing that the company will not fulfil their commitments and that the land will eventually be left in a degraded state.

However, despite concerns, there are some positive comments about renewable energy and its importance both locally and nationally, suggesting that while there are reservations about this particular project, there is still general support for clean energy initiatives.

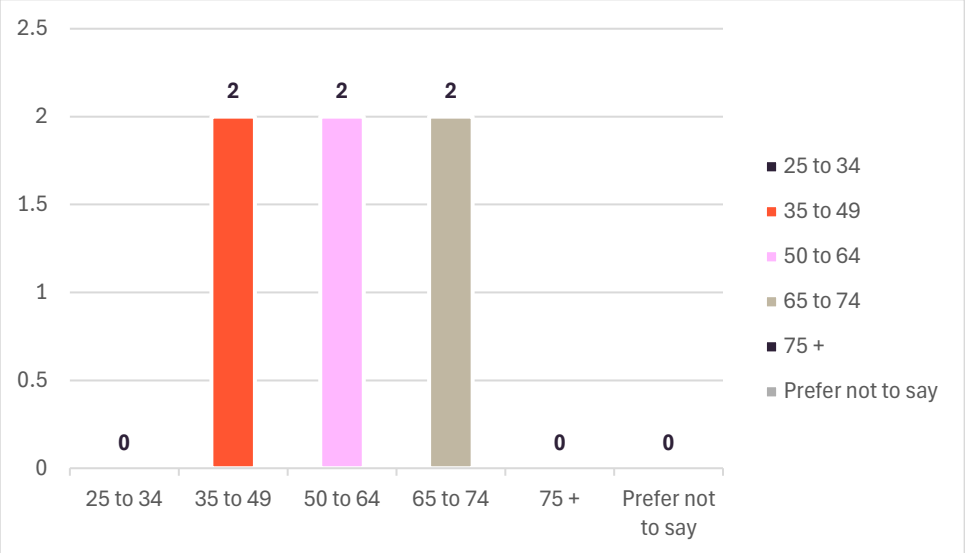
All responses received can be found in **Appendix 6.**

Q9. And finally, what could we change to make you more supportive?

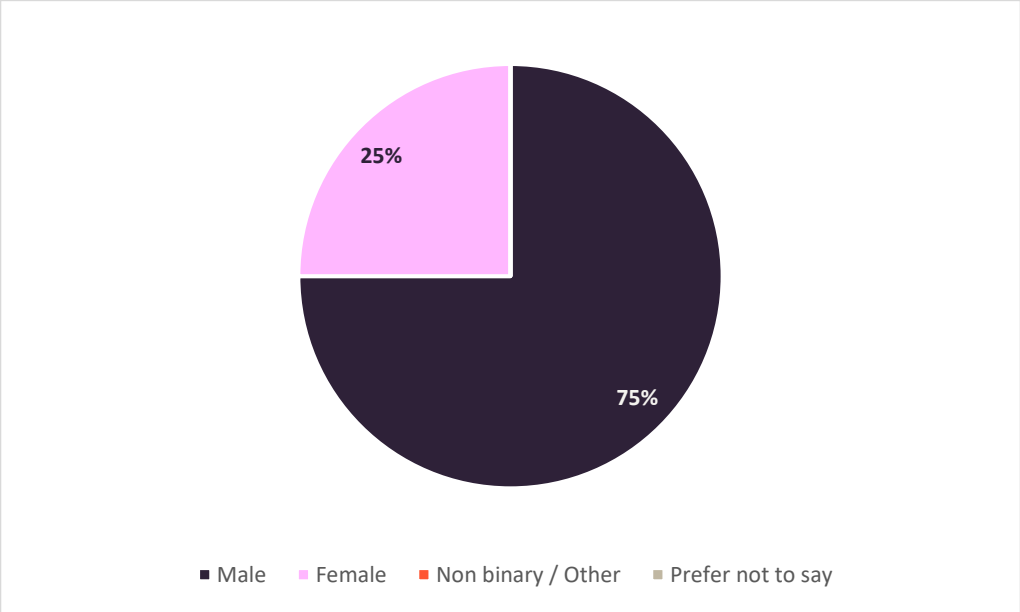
Three responses were recorded for this question with the full responses available at **Appendix 6.**

To understand the inclusivity of our engagement, we're asking some optional demographic questions.

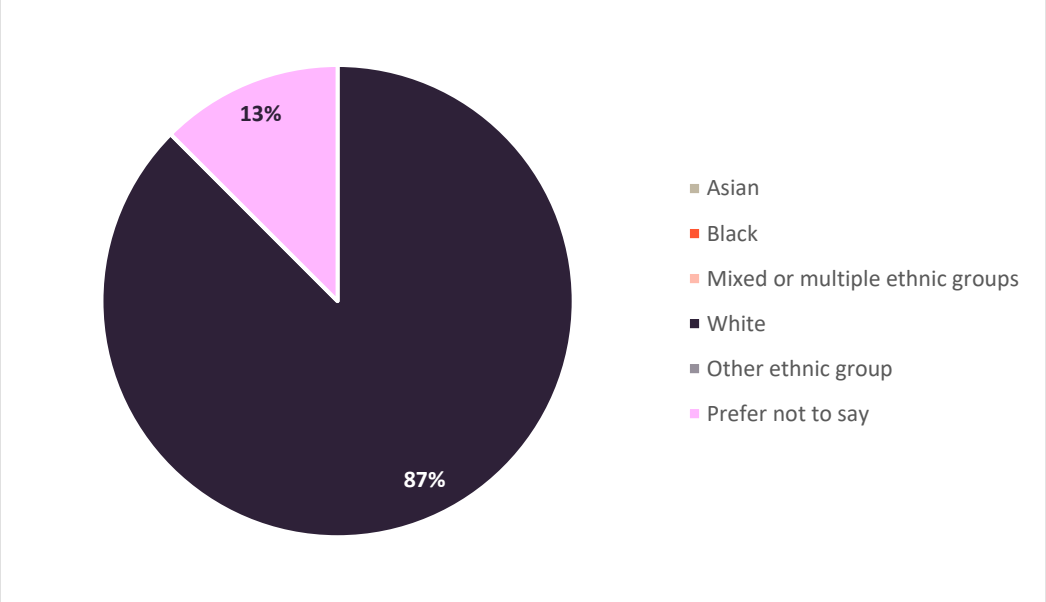
Q1. What is your age.



Q2. What is your gender?



Q3. How would you describe your ethnic background?



5.3 Other feedback

All comments received via the project email address and freephone telephone number were responded to by Meeting Place. The correspondence was mostly questions regarding the proposals such as the site location and registrations of interest from possible suppliers.

6. Response to key issues

All feedback has been reviewed by the team and responded to below.

Key theme	Belltown Power's response
Support for the proposals	Belltown Power is incredibly grateful for the support which has been shown by local residents for the proposals. 37.5% of feedback form respondents stated they supported plans for Hob Lane solar farm, with only 25% people stating they do not support.
Visual impact	Some responses stated that visual impact was a concern. As part of the proposals, the existing hedgerows will be retained, enhanced and strengthened where possible, providing valuable habitats and natural screening. Belltown Power will also be planting wildflower meadows to increase biodiversity that will complement the natural countryside location.

7. Conclusion

Belltown Power is grateful for those who engaged with the consultation and provided their important feedback. Engagement is a cornerstone of Belltown Power's approach to any project and Belltown Power is pleased that local residents engaged with the process, whether that be through the website, post or over the phone.

The feedback received has been carefully considered by Belltown Power and the wider project team and appropriate attention has been given to these concerns.

Belltown Power remains committed to engaging with local stakeholders and elected representatives throughout the development process.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Near neighbour letter

BELLTOWNPOWER

March 2025

Dear resident,

Community consultation for Hob Lane Solar Farm

I am writing to you on behalf of Belltown Power to inform you about our proposals for a new 30MW solar farm on land to the north-west of Dunham-on-the-Hill. This site has been carefully selected to deliver clean, renewable energy while supporting biodiversity, ecology and the local community.

The benefits of this important renewable energy project include:

- Generating enough green energy to meet the annual energy needs of approximately 13,260 homes, moving away from fossil fuel use.
- The ability for continued agricultural use, including sheep grazing, once the site is operational.
- Considerable biodiversity and ecological benefits including new hedgerows, ponds and wildflower meadows.
- A significant increase in biodiversity of approx. 30%, which exceeds the national requirement by 3 times.
- Genuine benefits for local residents including a community benefit and education fund of £600,000 over the project lifetime.

As your property is near the proposed development, we'd like to invite you to meet our team, share your feedback and ask any questions you may have. This meeting will be an opportunity for you to learn more about the proposals and raise any concerns. Your input is important to us and will help shape the future of this project. If you would like to arrange an appointment, please email us on hoblane@belltownpower.com and we can arrange a time that works best for you.

For more information about the proposals, please visit our project website at www.hoblanesolarfarm.co.uk. The website will go live on Monday 10th March to coincide with the launch of the engagement period. Here you will find detailed information about the project, including site location maps, key benefits and more information on Belltown Power.

Belltown are working with our stakeholder engagement consultant, Meeting Place, to help gather your views and feedback. We look forward to meeting you. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

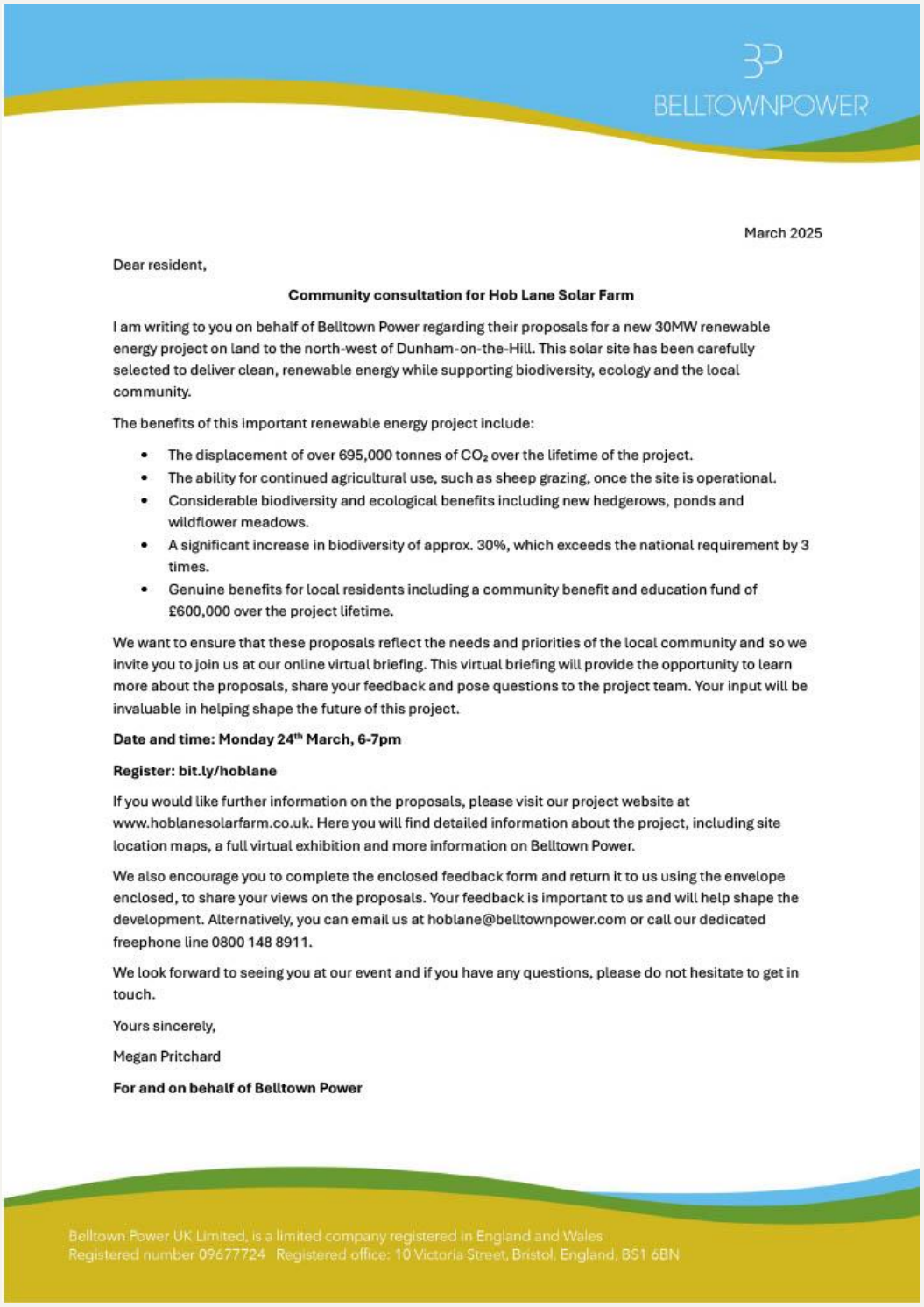
Yours sincerely,

Megan Pritchard

For and on behalf of Belltown Power

Belltown Power UK Limited, is a limited company registered in England and Wales
Registered number 09677724 Registered office: 10 Victoria Street, Bristol, England, BS1 6BN

Appendix 2 – Community letter and feedback form



March 2025

Dear resident,

Community consultation for Hob Lane Solar Farm

I am writing to you on behalf of Belltown Power regarding their proposals for a new 30MW renewable energy project on land to the north-west of Dunham-on-the-Hill. This solar site has been carefully selected to deliver clean, renewable energy while supporting biodiversity, ecology and the local community.

The benefits of this important renewable energy project include:

- The displacement of over 695,000 tonnes of CO_2 over the lifetime of the project.
- The ability for continued agricultural use, such as sheep grazing, once the site is operational.
- Considerable biodiversity and ecological benefits including new hedgerows, ponds and wildflower meadows.
- A significant increase in biodiversity of approx. 30%, which exceeds the national requirement by 3 times.
- Genuine benefits for local residents including a community benefit and education fund of £600,000 over the project lifetime.

We want to ensure that these proposals reflect the needs and priorities of the local community and so we invite you to join us at our online virtual briefing. This virtual briefing will provide the opportunity to learn more about the proposals, share your feedback and pose questions to the project team. Your input will be invaluable in helping shape the future of this project.

Date and time: Monday 24th March, 6-7pm

Register: bit.ly/hoblane

If you would like further information on the proposals, please visit our project website at www.hoblanesolarfarm.co.uk. Here you will find detailed information about the project, including site location maps, a full virtual exhibition and more information on Belltown Power.

We also encourage you to complete the enclosed feedback form and return it to us using the envelope enclosed, to share your views on the proposals. Your feedback is important to us and will help shape the development. Alternatively, you can email us at hoblane@belltownpower.com or call our dedicated freephone line 0800 148 8911.

We look forward to seeing you at our event and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Megan Pritchard

For and on behalf of Belltown Power

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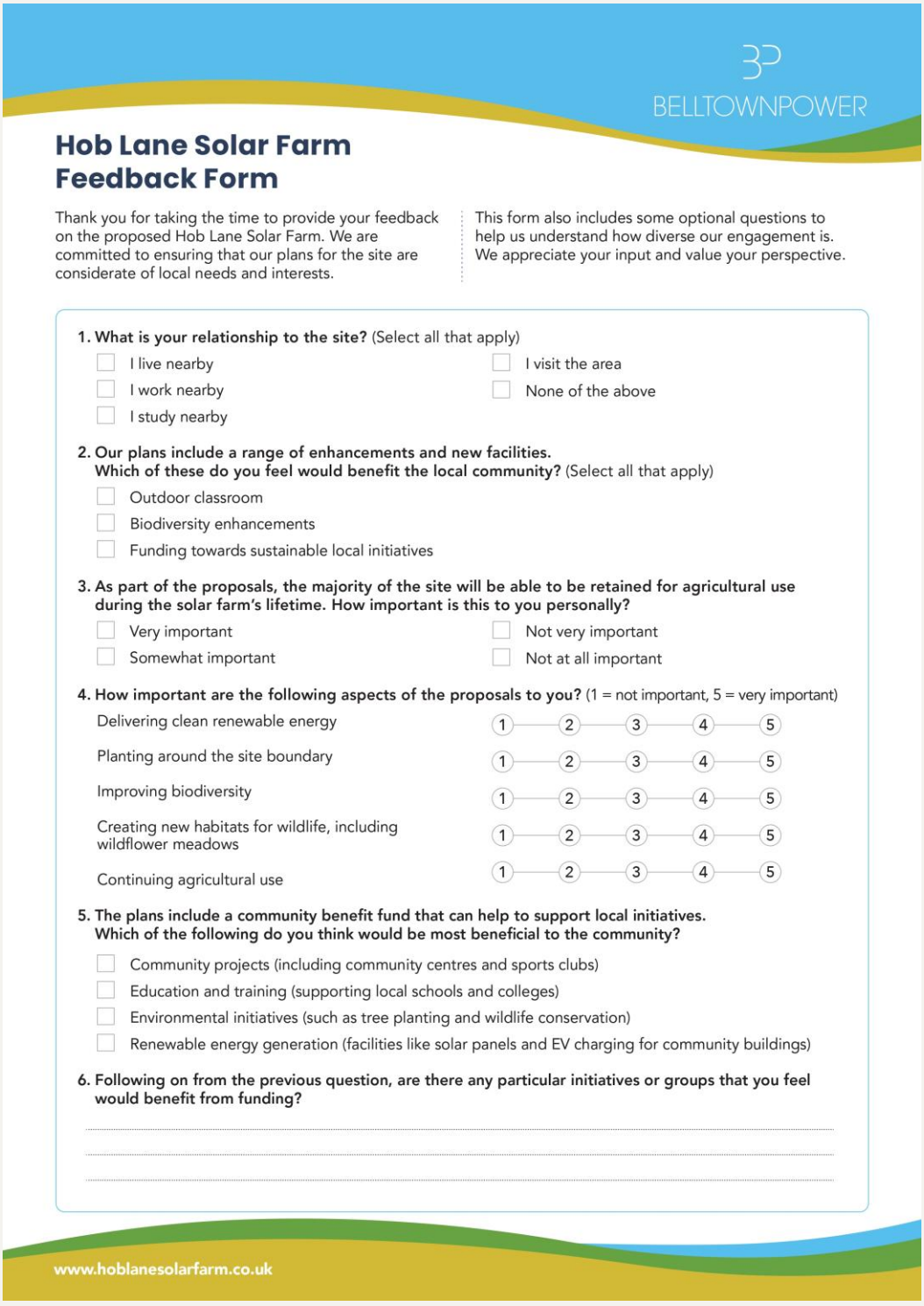

BELLTOWNPOWER

Hob Lane Solar Farm Feedback Form

Thank you for taking the time to provide your feedback on the proposed Hob Lane Solar Farm. We are committed to ensuring that our plans for the site are considerate of local needs and interests.

This form also includes some optional questions to help us understand how diverse our engagement is. We appreciate your input and value your perspective.

1. What is your relationship to the site? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I live nearby
- ☐ I work nearby
- ☐ I study nearby
- ☐ I visit the area
- ☐ None of the above

2. Our plans include a range of enhancements and new facilities. Which of these do you feel would benefit the local community? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Outdoor classroom
- ☐ Biodiversity enhancements
- ☐ Funding towards sustainable local initiatives

3. As part of the proposals, the majority of the site will be able to be retained for agricultural use during the solar farm's lifetime. How important is this to you personally?

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Not very important
- ☐ Not at all important

4. How important are the following aspects of the proposals to you? (1 = not important, 5 = very important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Delivering clean renewable energy	○	○	○	○	○
Planting around the site boundary	○	○	○	○	○
Improving biodiversity	○	○	○	○	○
Creating new habitats for wildlife, including wildflower meadows	○	○	○	○	○
Continuing agricultural use	○	○	○	○	○

5. The plans include a community benefit fund that can help to support local initiatives. Which of the following do you think would be most beneficial to the community?

- ☐ Community projects (including community centres and sports clubs)
- ☐ Education and training (supporting local schools and colleges)
- ☐ Environmental initiatives (such as tree planting and wildlife conservation)
- ☐ Renewable energy generation (facilities like solar panels and EV charging for community buildings)

6. Following on from the previous question, are there any particular initiatives or groups that you feel would benefit from funding?

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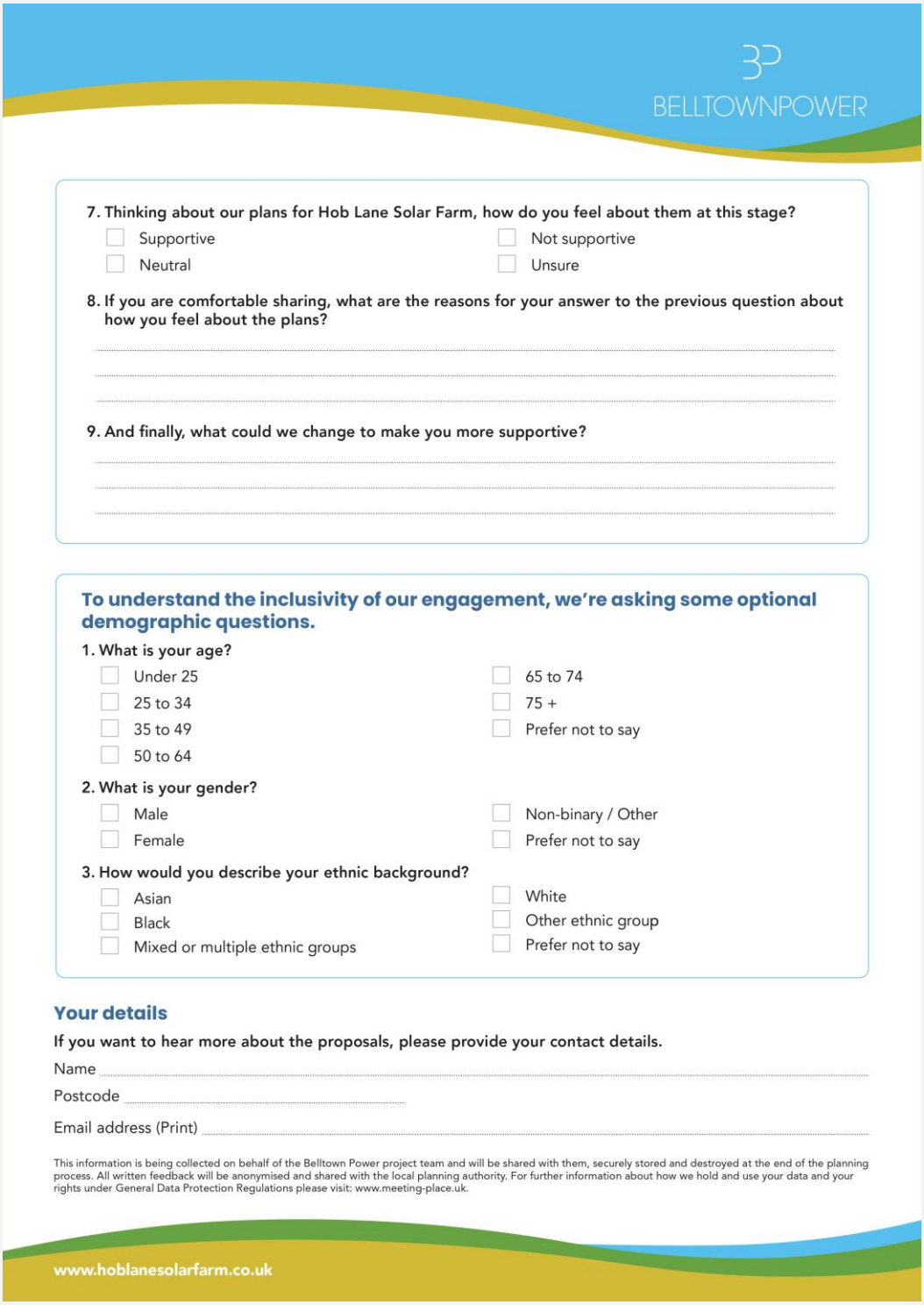
www.hoblanesolarfarm.co.uk



BELLTOWNPOWER

7. Thinking about our plans for Hob Lane Solar Farm, how do you feel about them at this stage?

- ☐ Supportive
- ☐ Not supportive
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Unsure

8. If you are comfortable sharing, what are the reasons for your answer to the previous question about how you feel about the plans?

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9. And finally, what could we change to make you more supportive?

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To understand the inclusivity of our engagement, we're asking some optional demographic questions.

1. What is your age?

- ☐ Under 25
- ☐ 25 to 34
- ☐ 35 to 49
- ☐ 50 to 64
- ☐ 65 to 74
- ☐ 75 +
- ☐ Prefer not to say

2. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. How would you describe your ethnic background?

- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other ethnic group
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Your details

If you want to hear more about the proposals, please provide your contact details.

Name .....

Postcode .....

Email address (Print) .....

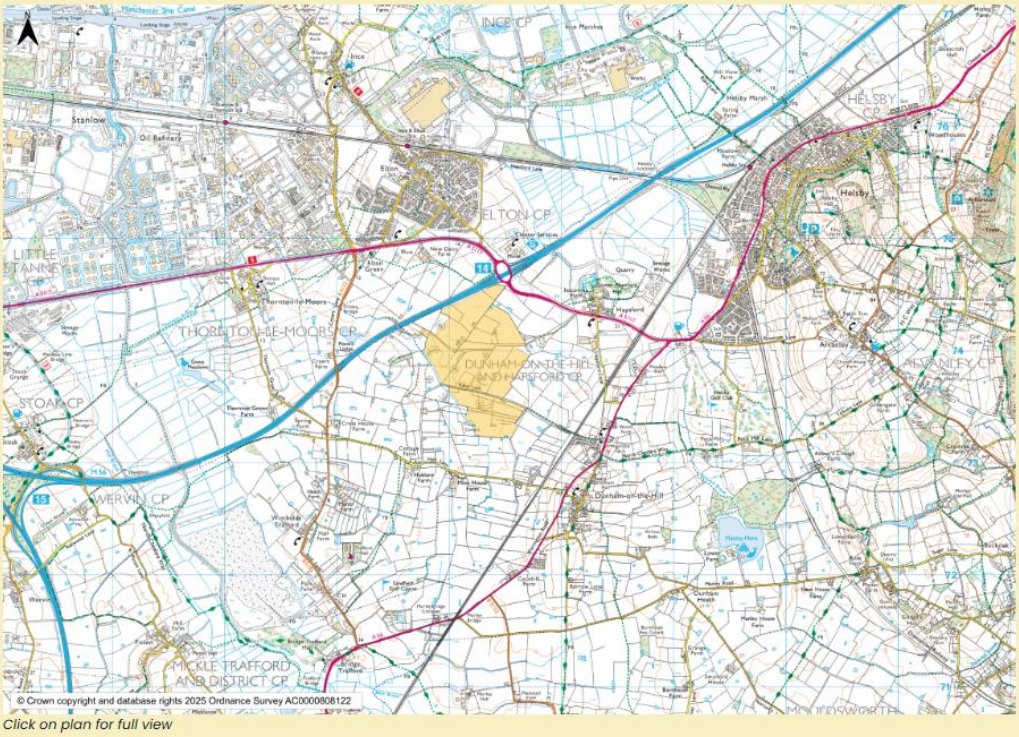
This information is being collected on behalf of the Belltown Power project team and will be shared with them, securely stored and destroyed at the end of the planning process. All written feedback will be anonymised and shared with the local planning authority. For further information about how we hold and use your data and your rights under General Data Protection Regulations please visit: www.meeting-place.uk.

www.hoblanesolarfarm.co.uk

Appendix 3 – Project website

Welcome to our website for Hob Lane Solar Farm

Belltown Power is pleased to be presenting their proposals for a renewable energy project on land to the northwest of Dunham-on-the-Hill. The proposed 30MWac solar farm would be able to generate enough green energy to meet the annual energy needs of approximately 13,000 homes, across 40 years.



Click on plan for full view

The Proposal

This site has been carefully selected to deliver clean, renewable energy while supporting biodiversity, ecology and the local community. The area is identified as Grade 3b agricultural land, which is not best and most versatile (BMV), and surveys are ongoing to confirm this. The proposals are temporary, with the solar farm expected to operate for 40 years before being fully decommissioned. During this time, the land will maintain its greenfield classification and at the end of its lifespan, all infrastructure will be removed and the site can be restored to its original use.

Click on plan for full view

The benefits of this important renewable energy project include:

- The proposed 30 MWac, 200-acre solar farm would be able to generate enough green energy to meet the annual energy needs of approximately 13,000 homes.
- The ability for continued agricultural use, such as sheep grazing, once the site is operational.
- Considerable biodiversity and ecological benefits including enhanced hedgerows, new wildflower meadows and active grassland management.
- A biodiversity net gain of at least 30%, over 3 times the national requirement.
- Outdoor classroom with picnic areas for local schools to use and enjoy on educational site visits.
- Genuine benefits for local residents including a community benefit and education fund of £600,000 over the projects lifetime.

Dunham-on-the-Hill and Hapsford Parish Council have recently published their draft **Neighbourhood Plan** for final review. Policy DHH 10 aims to 'encourage and support renewable energy generation at an appropriate scale that minimizes impact on the natural environment, biodiversity and local landscape character.' The plan also identifies key wildlife corridors intersecting the proposed Hob Lane site, which align with some of the hedgerow and scrubland corridors we will be enhancing. We will also be avoiding any impact on the old WWII ammunition stores scattered around the site; while these are not designated heritage assets, the Neighbourhood Plan describes them as of 'significant local historical and social interest'.

Above figures are based on the current proposal of 30MWac being consented and built.

Get involved

Feedback from the local community is important to us and we would like to hear your thoughts on this much needed renewable energy project.

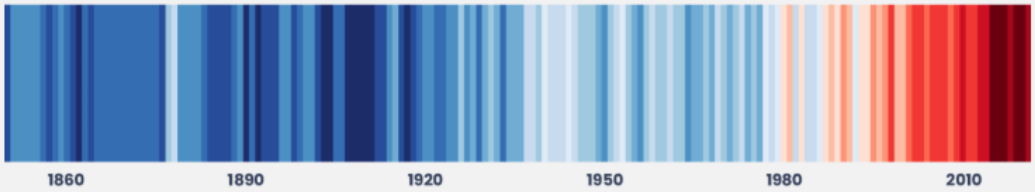
We would like to invite you to find out more about our proposal by attending:

- **Virtual Exhibition** see link in box below (available until 30 March)
- **Virtual Briefing** Monday 24th March, 6 – 7pm. Register for the Virtual Briefing **here**

Help shape the proposals by completing our online survey **here**. Please register via our project email **hoblane@belltownpower.com** if you would like to be kept informed of project developments or register as a local business.

Virtual Exhibition
The materials from our public exhibition are available to view online **here** (the link will open up in a new window).

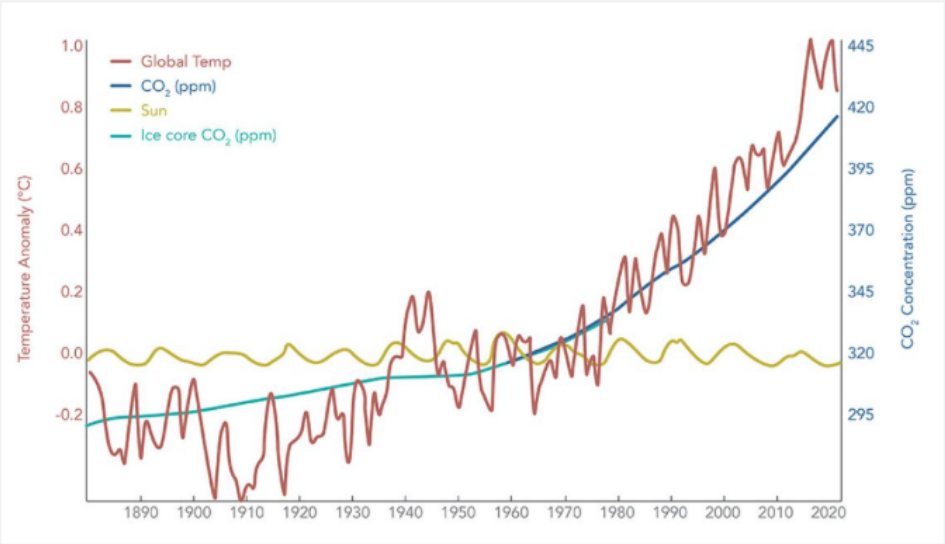
The need for Solar



Global temperature change since 1850. Show Your Stripes - Professor Ed Hawkins (University of Reading)

We are facing an unprecedented global climate crisis driven by our continued reliance on fossil fuels. Over the past 50 years, weather-induced disasters have increased fivefold, highlighting the urgent need for action. The UK's energy security faces growing challenges from volatile global fuel prices, supply chain disruptions and rising demand due to population growth.

Solar energy can support in addressing these risks by providing a stable, low-cost, home-grown source of renewable energy which enables us to reduce our reliance on imported sources of energy whilst simultaneously tackling the climate emergency. As the urgency to address climate change grows, renewable energy solutions like solar farms play a crucial role in reducing carbon emissions and supporting the transition to a net-zero future. By reducing reliance on fossil fuels, they contribute to a cleaner, more sustainable energy system.



Atmospheric CO2 since 1880

Recognising this urgency, Cheshire West and Chester Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has committed to becoming a carbon neutral borough by 2045, including increasing solar capacity to 800MW by 2050 (a 25x increase over 30 years). Hob Lane Solar Farm can support this target, while reducing the region's reliance on fossil fuels.

Climate change is also the biggest threat to food security and by delivering more green energy, we can reduce carbon emissions and mitigate against the effects of climate change. To meet the government's net zero carbon emissions targets, solar farms would have to take up just 0.6% of the UK land area – this is less than the amount land currently used for golf courses.

This shift towards cleaner energy is already underway. In 2023, the UK saw a 22% decline in electricity generation from fossil fuels, reflecting a national movement towards low-carbon alternatives. With fossil fuel use expected to continue falling, developing new renewable energy projects – such as Hob Lane Solar Farm – are essential to bridging the energy gap and securing a stable, low-carbon power supply for the future.

"If we don't act now, it'll be too late. Every day that goes by in which we don't do something about it is a day wasted."

SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

Biodiversity and Ecology

At Belltown Power, we are committed to ensuring that Hob Lane Solar Farm not only generates clean energy but also enhances biodiversity and supports local wildlife. The project has been designed with nature in mind, incorporating measures to protect and improve the natural environment for long-term ecological benefits.

Existing hedgerows will be retained, enhanced and strengthened, providing valuable habitats and natural screening. In addition, we will enhance existing ponds and scrubland areas across the site, contributing to a richer and more diverse local ecosystem. More details of the proposed enhancement plans can be found here.

To encourage wildlife, the site will feature barn owl boxes, beehives and mammal gates, offering essential habitats for new and existing species. Wildflower meadows will create a thriving environment for bees, butterflies and other pollinators. By reducing pesticide use and adopting sensitive land management practices, we will ensure the site remains a biodiverse and ecologically valuable space while also producing renewable energy.

Community

We are committed to ensuring that this solar farm delivers meaningful benefits for local residents, including educational opportunities.

By investing in community initiatives, biodiversity enhancements and sustainable development, we aim to create a lasting positive impact that extends beyond clean energy generation.

Community Benefit and Education Fund

The project will provide a significant community benefit and education fund of approximately £600,000 over the lifetime of the project, supporting local initiatives such as installing rooftop solar panels on community buildings, improving footpaths and funding conservation projects. We are committed to working closely with local communities to shape the fund, ensuring it supports the projects and priorities that matter most to them. To ensure the funding is used in a way that's most beneficial for the community we want to be flexible in how and when it is distributed, including offering front-loaded support for projects with high initial investment needs.

At our Sawmills Solar Farm site, Ashcombe Village Club Committee have used the funds to build a microwave broadband mast for the community, dramatically improving broadband speeds for residents. The funding has also gone towards a new defibrillator and improvements to the village hall.

In addition to the above, we are committed to supporting the next generations in developing the skills and knowledge needed for a sustainable future. Our Belltown Power Education Programme currently supports 15 schools near our sites, with plans to expand as new projects launch. Over their lifetime, these projects provide site visits, classroom activities and educational resources to over 10,000 children, inspiring future engineers, scientists and climate leaders. We also collaborate with higher education institutes on research, including studies on how renewable energy supports biodiversity.

Supporting the Local Economy

The Hob Lane project will contribute approximately £1.8 million in business rates to Cheshire West and Chester Council over its lifetime, helping to fund essential local services and infrastructure.

Belltown Power supports local communities by prioritising nearby suppliers where possible. Services needed include construction, materials, plant hire, security, fuel, waste management and local hospitality. We encourage local suppliers to register their business via our project email hoblane@belltownpower.com to explore opportunities.

Timeline

March 2025
Public consultation

April 2025
Review feedback

Spring 2025
Submission of temporary planning application

Winter 2025/6
Expected planning determination

FAQs

- Why has Belltown Power selected this site? +
- How can solar farms support food security? +
- How long will the solar farm be on this site? +
- Will there be any disturbance during construction? +
- Do we need solar farms as well as rooftop solar? +
- What is a community benefit fund? +

About Belltown Power

Belltown Power is an established UK based clean energy company at the leading edge of renewables project development in the UK. Founded in 2013 by a team of highly experienced renewable energy professionals, we have successfully delivered over 20 projects totalling over 200 MW of wind, solar and hydropower capacity across the UK.

Case study – Verwood Solar Farm

We are dedicated to ensuring that our renewable energy projects provide meaningful benefits to local communities. At Verwood Solar Farm in Dorset, an innovative educational programme has been in place since 2014, inspiring and educating young people about solar energy and sustainability. Over 2,000 young people have participated in site visits and workshops, with 43 school groups exploring the solar farm and a further 66 engaging in hands-on activities. These visits are tailored for nursery, primary, secondary and university students, providing real-world learning experiences.

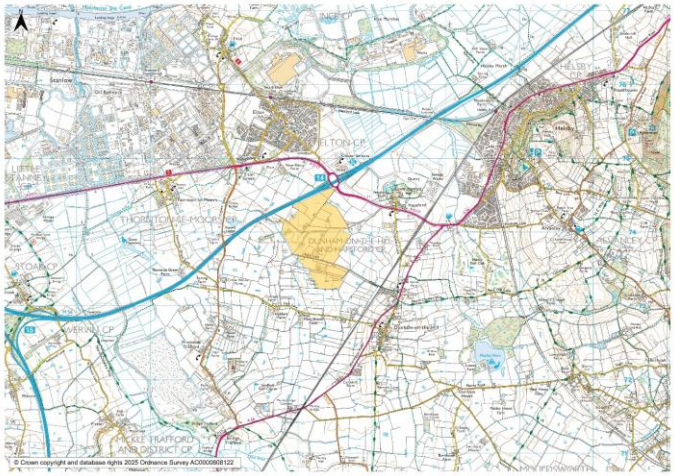
Through interactive site visits, students bridge the gap between theory and practice, learning about solar energy and biodiversity. They have the opportunity to meet solar engineers, gaining insight into careers in renewable energy, and participate in hands-on activities linked to the national curriculum and climate science.

On the project website users could also explore a virtual exhibition, images of the banners used on that page are below.

BELLTOWNPOWER

Welcome to our Hob Lane Solar Farm engagement event

Belltown Power is pleased to be presenting their proposals for a renewable energy project on land to the north-west of Dunham-on-the-Hill. The proposed 30MWac solar farm would be able to generate enough green energy to meet the annual energy needs of approximately 13,000 homes, across 40 years.



About Belltown

Belltown Power is an established UK based clean energy company at the leading edge of renewables project development in the UK. Founded in 2013 by a team of highly experienced renewable energy professionals, we have successfully delivered over 20 projects totalling over 200 MW of wind, solar and hydropower capacity across the UK.

For further information about Belltown Power, please visit our main website at **www.belltownpower.com/uk**

Have your say
Help shape the proposal by sharing your views or asking any questions.

At Belltown Power we:

1. responsibly develop renewable energy projects to help tackle the global climate emergency, deliver on climate change targets and ensure a green and sustainable future;
2. fundamentally believe that renewable energy projects should benefit the communities that host them. As part of this development we offer a community benefit and education fund, considerable biodiversity enhancement and commit to supporting local businesses; and
3. are committed to open and transparent consultation to ensure local communities are given the opportunity to consider, share their views and help shape the proposals.

HAVE YOUR SAY

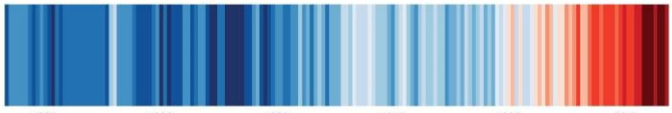
www.hoblanesolarfarm.com


BELLTOWNPOWER
Powering a greener future
Covering 200 acres and with 30MWac of fixed tilt, bifacial solar panels, this site has been carefully selected to deliver clean, renewable energy while supporting biodiversity, ecology and the local community. The benefits of this important renewable energy project include:
13,000 homes
Annually powering approx. 13,000 homes, displacing approx. 695,000 t CO_2 over the project lifetime.
The ability for continued agricultural use, such as sheep grazing, once the site is operational.
30%
A biodiversity net gain of around 30% - over 3 times the national requirement.
Considerable biodiversity and ecological benefits, including enhanced hedgerows, new wildflower meadows and active grassland management.
£600,000
Genuine benefits for local residents including a community benefit and education fund of £600,000 over the life of the project.
Managing existing and creating new ponds and surroundings to support the amphibians, insects and birds that thrive in these habitats.
Above figures are based on the current proposal of 30MWac being consented and built.
Biodiversity & landscape enhancements
Pond habitat creation
Barn owl boxes
Hives & mammal gates
Hedgerow enhancements
Sheep grazing
Wildflower meadow
Key
Community benefit
The community benefit fund will be available to support local initiatives such as rooftop solar on community buildings, footpath improvements or conservation projects.
To ensure the funding is used in a way that's most beneficial for the community we want to be flexible in how and when it is distributed, including offering front-loaded support for projects with high initial investment needs.
HAVE YOUR SAY
www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

BELLTOWNPOWER

The need for solar

Global temperature change since 1850



Show Your Stripes - Professor Ed Hawkins (University of Reading)

Tackling the climate emergency

Solar farms are needed to tackle the threat of climate change, with 2024 witnessing unprecedented global temperatures.

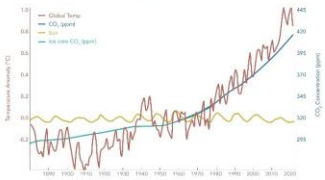
Cheshire West and Chester Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has committed to becoming a carbon neutral borough by 2045, including increasing solar capacity to 800MW by 2050 (a 25x increase over 30 years). Hob Lane Solar Farm can support this target, while reducing the region's reliance on fossil fuels.

Supporting the need for energy security

The UK's energy security faces growing challenges from volatile global fuel prices, supply chain disruptions and rising demand due to population growth.

Solar energy can support in addressing these risks by providing a stable, low-cost, home-grown source of renewable energy which enables us to reduce our reliance on imported sources of energy whilst simultaneously tackling the climate emergency.

Atmospheric CO_2 since 1880



> If we don't act now, it'll be too late. Every day that goes by in which we don't do something about it is a day wasted.
>
> SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

HAVE YOUR SAY

www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

BELLTOWNPOWER

Supporting local wildlife

Biodiversity and ecology

Solar farms can do more than generate clean energy – they also provide opportunities to enhance biodiversity and support local wildlife.

Research has shown that solar farms have the potential to become wildlife havens and we are working to ensure that our proposals for Hob Lane Solar Farm are no different.

Since 2015, Belltown's operational solar farms have been actively managed to promote their biodiversity. They have been subject to extensive study and research which has demonstrated that solar farms, if managed sensitively, as well as having a considerable positive impact on the local biodiversity and ecology, can provide habitats for declining species.

On Belltown's Sawmills site in South Devon, seven years of monitoring has shown a steady increase across the three indicator groups: botany, selected invertebrate pollinators and breeding birds

Key measures proposed include:

Wildflower meadows

act as a carbon sink and a source of nectar, boosting local wildlife including pollinators such as bees and butterflies

Hedgerow enhancement

creating habitats for small mammals and birds while also providing natural screening for local residents

Active grassland management

maintaining and enhancing the existing land, encouraging diverse natural habitat

Pond creation and habitat management

managing and planting vegetation on and around existing ponds to enhance wetland habitats

Other new habitats

installing barn owl boxes, bee hives, mammal gates and insect hotels, supporting local wildlife

The National Trust's State of Nature Report 2023 shows that British wildlife species are continuing to decline for a variety of reasons, including use of pesticides and habitat loss. The shift from intensive farming to a solar farm will allow the land to rest, reducing pesticide use and helping soil quality recover and improve over time.

The climate crisis and the ecological crisis are inextricably linked and should be tackled together. Well-considered and designed solar farms, such as Hob Lane Solar Farm, can help to do just that.

HAVE YOUR SAY

www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

BELLTOWNPOWER

Investing in the community

This project will deliver meaningful benefits for local residents, supporting community initiatives and providing education opportunities.

Community benefit fund

We will deliver a community benefit and education fund of £600,000[1] over the lifetime of the project. We will work with local communities to help shape the fund, ensuring that it supports the projects and priorities which matter most locally. This includes offering front loaded support for projects with high initial investment needs.

£600,000
community and education fund over the lifetime of the project

Supporting the local economy

This project will contribute approx. £1.8 million[2] in business rates over it's lifetime. Currently half of this income will go to Cheshire West and Cheshire Council helping to support local services and infrastructure, the other half will go to central government. Belltown Power supports local communities by prioritising nearby suppliers where possible, eg construction services, materials, plant hire, security, fuel, waste management and local hospitality. We encourage local suppliers to register their business via our website or email **hoblane@belltownpower.com** to explore opportunities.

£1.8 mil[2]
in business rates over the lifetime of the project

Inspiring future generations

Our growing Belltown Power Education Programme currently supports 15 schools near our sites. Over their lifetime, these projects provide site visits, classroom activities and educational resources to over 10,000 children, inspiring future engineers, scientists and climate leaders. We also collaborate with higher education institutes on research and how renewable energy supports biodiversity.

Included in the community benefit and education fund, this solar farm will provide £3,000 per year to be shared among local primary schools for site visits and classroom workshops. An outdoor classroom will be set up at Hob Lane to welcome these visits, and we also hope to work with secondary schools and universities to expand this educational offer.

£3,000 per annum
education fund for local schools to fund site visits and workshops over the lifetime of the project

1 This figure assumes an installed capacity of 30MWac and is subject to the final installed capacity.

2 Estimated annual rates calculated using the rateable value for a subsidy-free project as presented in the MoA between the VOA and Solar Energy UK and the 2024/25 UBC.

HAVE YOUR SAY

www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

BELLTOWNPOWER

Solar and sustainable farming

Solar farms and food production can work hand in hand, supporting the need for both food and energy security as well as tackling the climate emergency.

Farm diversification and viability

Solar farms can offer a form of diversification for farmers by offering a steady, reliable income that helps to keep the business viable and enables investment elsewhere.

They also provide a chance to optimise the land use by combining livestock farming, biodiversity enhancement and temporary renewable energy infrastructure. As well as allowing the land to rest and soil quality to increase, sheep can graze between the panels, benefitting from the shade and shelter they provide.

To meet the government's Net Zero carbon emissions targets, solar farms would have to take up just 0.6% of the UK land area – this is less than the amount land currently used for golf courses.

0.6%
UK land area required for solar, to meet Net Zero targets

Mitigating climate change

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has acknowledged that climate change could reduce the stock of high-grade agricultural land by nearly three-quarters by 2050.

Climate change is the biggest threat to food security and by delivering more green energy, we can reduce carbon emissions and mitigate against the effects of climate change.

75%
climate change could reduce prime agricultural land by nearly three-quarters by 2050

Quality of farmland

Belltown Power carefully considers agricultural land classification when selecting sites, ensuring that what's referred to as the best and most versatile (BMV) land is avoided where possible. Solar farms are typically placed on lower grade land, helping to protect prime farmland for food production.

Belltown carefully considers sites to protect prime farmland for food production

HAVE YOUR SAY

www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

BELLTOWNPOWER

Construction and operation

Belltown Power will be submitting a temporary planning application for 40 years.

Due to the nature of the scheme, the land will be designated as greenfield throughout. We will ensure the site is fully decommissioned and returned to its current state, as the planning permission would allow.

The site will not be classed as industrial or brownfield during or after the site has been decommissioned.

Construction

We will minimise disruption during construction as much as possible.

The site will be accessed via the A5117 (Hill View Way), turning onto the Common Lane, with all routes carefully planned to minimise local impact. The construction phase is expected to last 6–9 months, with further details outlined in the Construction Traffic Management Plan, which will be submitted as part of the planning application.

Operation

Throughout the operation of the site, traffic movements will be minimal, limited to occasional maintenance visits.

HAVE YOUR SAY

www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

BELLTOWNPOWER

Our commitment to the community

We are committed to ensuring that our renewable energy projects provide meaningful benefits to local communities.

Case study

At Verwood Solar Farm in Dorset, an innovative educational programme has been in place since 2014, helping to inspire and educate young people about solar energy and sustainability.

Engaging young minds

2,000

Over 2,000 young people have participated in site visits and workshops at Verwood alone.

Visits are tailored for nursery, primary, secondary and university students, providing real world learning experiences.

43

school groups have explored the solar farm, with a further 66 groups engaging in hands on workshops.

Bringing learning to life

Through interactive site visits, students have been able to:

- Bridge the gap between theory and practice, learning about solar energy and biodiversity.
- Meet solar engineers, gaining insight into careers in renewable energy.
- Participate in hands-on activities linked to the national curriculum and climate science.

Creating thriving habitats for future generations

An environmental management scheme is in place to enhance habitats for birds, reptiles and invertebrates, ensuring a net positive impact on biodiversity. Annual surveys guide ongoing improvements, while lowland meadows at Verwood now support over 70 native plant species, providing vital forage for bumblebees and butterflies with bug hotels are also being installed to attract more invertebrates.

I really enjoyed learning about the solar panels because it made me think about how I can save energy at home!

YEAR 4 PUPIL

Our relationship with the farm is invaluable; a long term commitment has enabled us to design a curriculum that meets the needs of our learners.

HEAD TEACHER AT WIMBORNE ST GILES SCHOOL

Looking ahead

We want to build on this success, using our renewable energy projects as platforms for education and engagement. We aim to inspire future generations, ensuring that learning about sustainability a hands-on experience for all the community.

HAVE YOUR SAY

www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

BELLTOWNPOWER

Next steps

Provide your feedback today

Please take some time today to provide your feedback on the proposals. You can do this by completing the feedback form provided, speaking to a member of the project team or visiting our website.

The consultation period closes on 30th March 2025. Please visit our dedicated project website or complete a feedback form to sign up for updates on the proposals.

Timeline

Contact us

- 0800 148 8911 (freephone)
- hoblane@belltownpower.com
- Freepost MEETING PLACE CONSULTATION (no stamp required)
- www.hoblanesolarfarm.co.uk

Have your say

Help shape the proposal by sharing your views or asking any questions.

HAVE YOUR SAY

www.hoblanesolarfarm.com

Appendix 4 – Press release

Embargoed for publication on 10th March 2025

Plans for solar farm near Dunham-on-the-Hill and Hapsford will generate enough power for over 13,200 homes

The site, known as Hob Lane Solar Farm, is being brought forward by Belltown Power and will meet the equivalent energy needs of approximately 13,200 homes.

Belltown Power is an established clean energy company at the leading edge of project development in the UK. Founded in 2013 by a team of highly experienced renewable energy professionals, it has successfully delivered over 200MW of now operating wind, solar, and hydropower capacity across Scotland, Wales and England.

Prior to submission, Belltown will be holding a virtual briefing for the community on Monday 24th March between 6-7pm. This virtual briefing will provide the opportunity to learn more about the proposals, share feedback and pose questions to the project team. Please register using bit.ly/hoblane.

Once the site is operational, Belltown will be providing a community benefit and education fund of £600,000 over the lifetime of the project. This funding will help support local initiatives such as rooftop solar on community buildings or conservation projects as well as funding for local primary schools to visit the sites and hold classroom workshops.

Solar farms don't just generate clean electricity and help tackle the climate emergency; they also allow for continued agricultural use including sheep grazing and have the potential to become havens for wildlife, increasing local biodiversity. Enhanced landscaping including hedgerows will both screen the site and provide valuable habitats for a wide variety of animals. New ponds habitats, wildflower meadows and beehives will support pollinators, alongside insect hotels and bird boxes.

Ruth Luckins, from Belltown Power said: "We are very much looking forward to speaking to members of the community about our plans for Hob Lane Solar Farm. If approved, this solar farm will provide much-needed renewable energy, helping to decarbonise the electricity network and support Cheshire West and Chester Council in meeting its net zero carbon emissions targets."

A planning application for a new solar farm near Dunham-on-the-Hill and Hapsford will be submitted in late spring / early summer to Cheshire West and Chester Council.

For further information about the scheme, please visit the project website: www.hoblanesolarfarm.com.

Notes for editor

For further enquiries, please contact: hoblane@belltownpower.com

Appendix 5 – Media coverage

Chester Standard

Solar farm plans for outskirts of Chester unveiled

10TH MARCH BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT CHESHIRE CHESTER ELLESMERE PORT

Plans for a solar farm near Chester have been unveiled. *(Image: Belttown)*

By Jonathon Barnett

Share 0 Comments

Chester's Dee Radio

Plans for a solar farm near Dunham-on-the-Hill and Hapsford

News Home | More from Local News

Monday, 10 March 2025 09:00

Hob Lane Solar Farm, is being brought forward by Belltown Power and will meet the equivalent energy needs of approximately 13,200 homes.

Appendix 6 – Verbatim feedback responses

Q7. Following on from the previous question, are there any particular initiatives or groups that you feel would benefit from funding?

- The Parish of Dunham on the Hill, community projects, Village Hall and creating more green spaces.
- Schools
- Horn's Mill Pre-School; an independent charity and the only independent pre/school/ nursery in the area.
- Local funding is just a spin doctor way of trying to appease local residents.. its largely of non affect..

Q8. If you are comfortable sharing, what are the reasons for your answer to the previous question about how you feel about the plans?

- We need more time to consider the proposals, especially our residents. We would ask that another month at least is given to the proposal and if needs be a residents meeting.
- It will look an absolute mess
- We have to do something and I'd prefer a farm to a turbine. We have to do what we can to continue educating children about the devastating effects of climate change. A farm would seem to give us the 'best of both worlds' - clean energy and nature's gifts.
- Please confirm plans for access during the construction phase. This doesn't border on to Hob Lane so why is it called Hob Lane solar farm. Hob Lane is NOT SUITABLE for any form of construction traffic. The 40 year decommissioning promise is a complete load of rubbish. The company will be long since bankrupt and struck off by that point and decommissioning will be completely unenforceable, leaving a field full of rusting metal.. no biodiversity or agriculture possible. Leave it a green field and forget the useless form of renewable energy in the countryside. Put your panels on every industrial building in the country.
- Renewable energy is very important both locally and nationally
- The actual panels look unsightly - based on the ones I have seen at other sites e.g. Deeside Industrial estate

Q9. And finally, what could we change to make you more supportive?

- Talk to the Parish Council and the residents, not everyone has access to a computer.
- Don't do it (scrap the plans)
- Lobby government to make industrial solar installations tax efficient.. NOT in the countryside, ruining views and the future of agriculture in this country.