



Westhide solar power proposal

Green energy Biodiversity Sustainability



TEKSS is a renewable energy developer working across the UK to develop high-quality renewable energy schemes.

We work together with landowners to find suitable sites for renewable energy developments that are technically, environmentally and financially viable whilst complementing the wider objectives the landowner has for their landholding.

We work to best practices and develop only the most environmentally-appropriate sites.

Over the past few years we have been working with the Westhide Estate to assess the potential for a solar power scheme whilst increasing the biodiversity of the landholding.



About the site

Careful analysis to date has identified a potential site to the north-west of the village which could host a solar power project of up to 40 megawatts (MW) of installed capacity.

A site of this size could generate enough green electricity to power over 14,000 homes per annum – equivalent to more than 40% of the number of households in the entire Hereford locality.*

This particular site presents a unique and significant opportunity to generate a substantial amount of clean energy in the Hereford locality whilst remaining well screened from neighbouring properties and footpaths, as well as contributing to the ecological ambitions of Westhide Estate.

The site is well screened by existing hedgerows and tree lines, with additional planting planned to enhance further screening. TEKSS will work to fully assess the final design to ensure hedgerows are protected, reinforced where required, and that the solar farm sits appropriately within local topography. This will ensure that the site will have a minimal visual impact whilst being large enough to be commercially viable.

The project will enable direct ecological enhancements and biodiversity improvements on over 100 acres of monocultural arable land, whilst providing funds for further ecological work elsewhere on the Estate.



* The environmental benefit figures are based on 40MW of installed solar PV, operating with a 12% capacity factor, a Typical Domestic Consumption Value (TDCV) for a medium-use household of 2900kWh per annum (Ofgem 2020), UK government figures on the carbon emissions for homes on the average energy fuel mix (2019) and 2011 Census figures.

The environmental benefits

A solar power project at Westhide fits within and supports the long-term sustainability strategy of the Estate.

Firstly, within the wider sustainability context, the potential site identified at Westhide can make a significant contribution to renewable energy and carbon emission targets, by generating enough green electricity to power over 14,000 homes – equivalent to more than 40% of the number of households in the Hereford locality, and offsetting around 9,700 tonnes of CO₂ annually.

Secondly, ground-mounted solar PV technology brings with it a significant ecological net benefit to the site on which it is installed.

These benefits include:

- The land used for the scheme will be taken out of the monoculture of arable crop production for up to three decades and reseeded with a wildflower mix, thus creating a wildflower meadow under the panels; this is not only a substantial benefit to a variety of wildlife, but also improves soil quality.
- Existing valuable habitat, such as woodland and hedgerows, is retained as part of the scheme and further enhanced with additional planting (which has the added benefit of screening the site visually).
- Westhide Estate has insisted on the creation of additional habitat, with supplementary features and ecological enhancements, such as the introduction of onsite beehives and hibernacula for small mammals and reptiles, is included within the scheme.

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The landowner's view

"Following an approach by TEKSS with the idea of developing a solar scheme on part of the estate I needed to consider how such a scheme might fit within the balance of ecological enhancement on the estate and the commercial sustainability of our rural business.

More recently came the Neighbourhood Development Plan that identified Townsend Farm yard, the last derelict area of the estate to be regenerated, as a potential location for residential development within Westhide village. I then considered how the TEKSS proposal could influence the strategic direction of regeneration at Townsend Farm, given a simple option between agricultural activity or pursuit of residential development and the more complex consideration of the nature of these two options, including ecological improvements.

My vision has always been to continue to improve the ecology of the environment in and around Westhide. The commercial contribution of the solar development would certainly facilitate the most ecologically sympathetic developments within the curtilage of the village, offering a biodiverse haven in its own right whilst contributing to the UK carbon neutral energy target.

There are three potential routes for the development of Townsend farmyard.

- Agri-business – agricultural activity providing a long-term, sustained revenue stream for the estate
- Commercial housing – a development (subject to planning) offering a significant but one-off financial gain
- Eco-housing – a more ecologically-enhanced and consequentially less commercial residential development (subject to planning), this option would offer further ecological enhancement of the village environment, an option that the solar power project would make possible whilst adding a major ecological component in its own right

My preference is for the third option, an ecologically imaginative development that completes the interconnected components of our work on the estate that create sustainability and enhance local ecology and community.

As was outlined in our 2004 estate prospectus the vision from the start has been to create an environment that could be shared by all that have sympathy for the estate project. I would certainly look forward to discussing possibilities and projects for developing biodiversity across and around the proposed development."

Luke Thompson-Coon
Owner of Westhide Estate

Education

If the solar power project is successful TEKSS will enable educational outreach efforts to take advantage of the excellent educational opportunity for local school children to learn about sustainable energy production as well as the associated benefits to wildlife, habitat and the general ecology of the site.

This will be facilitated by information boards around the scheme perimeter and enabling site visits with relevant educational experts.



Public access

The fields that have been identified as suitable for the solar power development are currently not accessible to the general public.

Should the development go ahead, TEKSS will include a plan for public access amongst the separate components of the solar park for the duration of the scheme.

Westhide Estate views a solar development as facilitating the delivery of its existing sustainability objectives but is also keen to hear suggestions from the local community to identify additional ways the Estate could invest revenue arising from the solar farm to further its sustainability goals and the role it plays within the local community.



Environmental & technical assessments

TEKSS is a responsible developer and the site will undergo a rigorous assessment process to ensure it is sensitively designed to account for local ecology, topography and visual amenity. The assessment process will not only be used to inform the design of the scheme but also to improve knowledge of the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the land on the Estate.

TEKSS will engage proactively with statutory and non-statutory consultees and the local community at Westhild to ensure that their feedback influences the design and development of the solar farm.

TEKSS would greatly welcome suggestions from the local community on how local biodiversity could be enhanced further by any forthcoming scheme and any other considerations.

A summary of some of the core environmental and technical assessments that will be undertaken are detailed below:

Landscape assessment – An assessment of the visual impact of the development on neighbouring properties and key locations. The design of the scheme will evolve during this assessment with locations of proposed boundaries being moved to ensure that they benefit fully from local topography and locations of additional planting identified.

Cultural heritage – An assessment of existing cultural heritage features in and around the site. This will include a review of known records, heritage assets and identifying buried archaeology on site. Onsite geophysical work may be required to scan the ground and potentially trial pits to physically inspect the site.

Ecology & biodiversity – An assessment of the local wildlife and habitats. TEKSS has already committed to keeping the development 5 metres from existing hedgerows to reduce any potential impact on wildlife. A key aim of the project is to produce net biodiversity benefits.

Transport – An assessment that looks at the transport routes for the construction period along with routes for operational traffic. Vehicle movements are weighted heavily towards the construction period which tends to be a fairly short period (circa four months) and it is important to ensure that traffic is managed throughout this period to ensure local schools and peak travel hours are accommodated to maximise safety and minimise impacts on local residents. Once operational vehicle movements will be low, and in fact considerably lower than is required for the current farming of the land.

Planning

Should assessments show that the land at Westhide Estate is suitable to host a solar farm the proposal will go through the planning permission process with Herefordshire Council.

TEKSS will proactively engage with the Council to ensure they have all the necessary information to make a high-quality assessment of the proposal.

Consultation

Consultation is a key component of the TEKSS development process. TEKSS seeks to engage local stakeholders and communities to work together to ensure that any future planning application incorporates local feedback and is designed to the highest standard.

Unfortunately, due to current COVID-19 restrictions, TEKSS cannot currently offer in-person consultation at Westhide but the development team will be available by phone, email and videocall. TEKSS will also provide key materials and project updates online.

Should restrictions be lifted TEKSS will be happy to make new arrangements, such as hosting a public exhibition at TIOS House, for example.



For project queries:

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