Homewood Farm Solar Project
Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: 3rd April 2025

Who are BWCE?

BWCE is a successful community-owned business established in 2010 to develop a not-for-profit community energy model. Our renewable energy projects place ownership in the hands of local people and actively benefit local communities in Bath, North East Somerset, parts of Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire. In addition to energy generation BWCE is focused on lowering energy demand and using renewables more efficiently; last year the BWCE Home Energy service launched to support householders in addressing the challenge of retrofitting inefficient and draughty homes.

If you would like further information about BWCE, please follow this link.

What sort of structure does BWCE have?

BWCE is a Community Benefit Society. This means it is governed by a set of rules that specify what it does and how it should be run to ensure community benefit. A Community Benefit Society is a form of Industrial and Provident Society that is legislated for by Government and registered with the Financial Conduct Authority. Community Benefit Societies are enterprises that trade for the benefit of the community.

- As a Community Benefit Society, BWCE is run by its members and can raise money from its membership and pay an interest rate that is sufficient to attract and retain the investment. For more details follow this link.
- Members can invest between £100 and £100,000 each and they have one vote regardless of the size of their investment.
- Shares are issued at £1 each and cannot be transferred but they can be withdrawn at the discretion of the Board of Directors.
- The share price does not increase in value.
- BWCE has an asset lock that protects the founding principles and ethos of the business and means that our projects cannot be sold for commercial gain.

Who runs BWCE and how can I be sure that the organisation is managed properly?

BWCE is run by its members who elect six non-executive directors on the basis of one member, one vote. Directors can serve for three years before resigning or standing for re-election. Our current group of elected directors bring significant experience of renewable energy, community enterprises and business management. There is one executive director, the Managing Director who provides professional expertise and continuity to the operation of the board. The board has also co-opted Directors who provide additional expertise on financial and legal issues. The board is supported by a growing staff team, with further expertise being drawn in when needed. For details of Directors and staff please follow this link.

The Society is governed by a constitution, and the constitution rules can only be changed by member vote. The financial returns are independently audited and published to members with full transparency on financial performance and ongoing viability of the business. An AGM is held every year to review performance and for members to vote on resolutions proposed, including the election of non-executive directors.

Will the Directors benefit personally?

The non-executive directors put their time in on a voluntary basis. Each director is a member and will receive interest on any investment in the same way as other members. The Managing Director is paid a salary. To see a statement of director earnings follow this link.

Who commissioned the project?

BWCE were commissioned in 2021 by Freshford and Limpley Stoke Parish Councils to investigate potential solar farm locations within the parishes of Freshford and Limpley Stoke. A number of sites identified were not progressed due to either lack of grid availability, inappropriate access or topography, or lack of landowner engagement. The report is publicly available on the Freshford parish website by following **this link**.

The Homewood Farm site had previously been identified by Freshford and Limpley Stoke Parish Councils as a potential site, and on further assessment was deemed as a potential option due to grid availability, good access and a responsive landowner. BWCE applied for Community Energy Fund (CEF) grant funding in 2024 to support a very early-stage technical assessment, which was awarded. The grant application received letters of support from Freshford, Limpley Stoke and Hinton Charterhouse Parish Councils.

BWCE covered half of the cost of the above assessment in 2021, hence Freshford and Limpley Stoke Parish Councils were charged a heavily discounted fee of £3,500. No further payments have been made to BWCE from the parish councils, and none of the parish councils have any current financial involvement in the Homewood Solar Farm project.

What are the timescales for delivering Homewood Farm Solar Project?

BWCE received CEF 2 funding in February 2025, which will support a fuller feasibility assessment, including pre-planning surveys throughout 2025. Details of which surveys are being undertaken can be found on the last of our information boards by following **this link**.

Developing a community solar project is an iterative process, and unexpected findings from surveys and challenges need to be managed along the way. Throughout the process, BWCE conduct reviews at various stages of the project to assess the project's viability at that point, and a decision on whether to proceed to the next stage is made.

The next review will be prior to a full planning application submission.

In advance of this, a community consultation will be undertaken, which will give local residents the opportunity to see the design and plans for the solar farm.

Subject to the outcome of the ongoing feasibility assessment for the Homewood Farm Solar Project, a planning application could be submitted late 2025, with a view to install late 2026 or early 2027.

For more information about the history of the project, the work that has been carried out to date, and upcoming tasks, please see the last of our information boards by following this link.

Where will the cables go?

The solar farm will be connected to the existing 11kV power lines within the site. All trenching and cabling will be within the solar site boundary, with a short easement into the north half of the field (owned by the same landowner) to connect to the power lines. There is no anticipated cabling or trenching due to take place in the surrounding fields and roads.

How tall will the different elements of the site be?

The exact dimensions of the solar farm equipment will be determined once the design is frozen prior to a planning application.

Typically, the height of the installed solar panels are 2.1 metres from the ground. The district network operator (DNO) cabins and switchgear control rooms are typically around 3.5 metres in height. Satellite masts can extend approximately 2 metres above the cabins, but the requirement for a mast will be determined by the DNO when onsite signal tests are undertaken.

What will be the noise, glare and flooding impacts of the project?

Noise

Noise surveys are not always required for solar farms due to the minimal noise impact. There are some devices such as inverters and transformers which do make a noise, but careful siting will minimise or eliminate the impact of this and should be seen in the context of the background noise for the site, as well. As such, a noise survey is not required by B&NES for a planning application. Homewood Farm Solar Project is also located next to the A36, which generates far more noise than the solar farm will.

Glint and Glare

Solar panels are designed to absorb light, not reflect it. Glare is minimised through translucent coating materials to improve light transmittance through glass. In fact, grass produces more glare than a solar array. The solar array for Homewood will be facing south, away from housing. The site is surrounded by trees and additional planting will screen the panels.

Flooding

The site is in Flood Risk Zone 1, which means there is low risk of flooding. The pre-planning application we submitted to Bath & North East Somerset Council did not identify any concerns with flooding at this site, which will be demonstrated by the Flood Risk Assessment and Drain Strategy which will be conducted by our professional consultant.

Wouldn't it be better to use the site for farming and strengthen the UK's food security?

The proposed site for the Homewood Farm Solar Project is classified as "Grade 4 – poor quality agricultural land". The UK government describes Grade 4 as "Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops or level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (for example cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In moist climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties using the land. The grade also includes arable land that is very dry because of drought." Therefore, the solar farm would not be infringing on high quality agricultural land.

In general, solar farms can actually help improve food security by providing farmers with a steady and reliable source of revenue to support their farming business. Farmers can diversify their business and allow their livestock, such as sheep, to continue to graze around the solar panels. This approach allows the soil to be restored with no pesticides from previous intensive farming practices. Additionally, solar farms help combat climate change, which experts have identified as the single biggest threat to global food security. Further information is available in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' UK Food Security Report **linked here**.

Will this project lead to more traffic in the local area?

During the construction phase there will be Heavy Goods Vehicles delivering equipment and materials to the site. The majority of these movements will be in the first 1 - 2 months of building the solar farm, and after that they will fall off sharply. Once the main deliveries and enabling works are complete in the first 2 months, traffic to site will mostly consist of cars and work vans.

BWCE's priorities are to minimise disruption and to ensure the safety of other road users, and we will work with the local authority to produce a Construction Traffic Management Plan that sets out clearly the measures that will be implemented to do this. For Homewood Farm, access into the site is planned to be directly off the A36 to ensure the impact of construction traffic is minimised for local residents.

After the solar farm is built there will be minimal traffic – with occasional maintenance visits. This is typically one visit a month in a small van.

How long will the solar park be in operation?

The lifespan of the solar park will be 40 years once commissioned, which will be the length of the lease agreement between the BWCE and the landowner.

What happens at the end of the solar farm's lifespan?

At the end of the project, the solar panels and all other equipment will be removed from the surface and to a depth of one metre below ground level. The land will be reinstated back to the condition prior to installation in accordance with a mutually agreed photographic schedule. BWCE will make provision for setting aside monies to pay for removing the solar equipment at the expiry of the lease which is typical for any solar farm.

Furthermore, when the site is decommissioned, the biodiversity of the site will have been increased, meaning an overall improvement in natural habitat and ecological features. We have undertaken ecological surveys and are confident we can develop the site to deliver a significant net gain in biodiversity, far above the minimum 10% required by planning policy. A biodiversity net gain (BNG) metric calculation has been carried out as part of the assessment, which confirms the potential gains are in

excess of 25%. On other sites, we have seen significant biodiversity gains. For example, the BWCE site Wilmington Community Solar Project has seen a biodiversity net gain of 60%.

Will the site become "brownfield" when the project is over?

At our public consultations, some residents raised concerns that the site will become "brownfield". The UK government defines brownfield as "developed land that is, or was previously, occupied by a permanent structure". The solar farm is a temporary structure, and therefore the site will not become brownfield at the end of the project's lifespan.

Will the solar farm supply electricity to my house directly?

The Homewood Farm Solar Project will be connected to the local grid network at Low Voltage via our secured grid connection. This is the same network as the primary sub-station to which local households are connected.

BWCE aims to set up a local power club that local households can join. Joining the club is entirely optional but it will give households the opportunity to buy the electricity generated by the solar farm to the local grid network at a special green power tariff.

This solar electricity will be shared by the local power club households who are using electricity at the time the solar farm is generating. Sometimes your share will be enough to cover all the electricity you are using during that time; at other times you will be buying a mix of electricity from the Homewood Farm Solar Project and the grid via the licensed electricity supplier supporting the club.

How can you install a solar farm in the Green Belt and a National Landscape (previously called Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)?

BWCE have received a Pre-Application response from B&NES Planning Authority, which notes that the application site lies within a sensitive landscape within the Green Belt and the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Notwithstanding its location within these sensitive areas, this area is identified as having "moderate" potential for small scale (up to 5 hectares) solar energy development in the 2021 LUC Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Renewable Energy Development. The 2021 assessment defines "moderate" potential to mean that the development would likely cause a degree of change in character and that particular care would need to be taken with regard to siting and design.

For Homewood Solar Farm, the effects on the Cotswolds National Landscape are a temporary and small change to land cover, from an open field to the development.

There will also be a slight increase in landscape character elements such as hedges, hedgerow trees and habitats. This is not considered to be a substantial change, however, due to the sensitive nature of a development in this area, BWCE plan to request a formal Screening Opinion from B&NES Planning Authority for further confirmation.

Will this development make it easier for other, similar projects to obtain planning permission?

Firstly, every planning application is judged on its own merits by the Local Planning Authority. Secondly, a project such as this requires a range of factors to align such as grid capacity, available land, access as well as other geographical factors, without these there is not potential for a project.

Are there plans to extend the project in adjacent fields?

At the recent public information sessions one key concern we heard from residents was the possibility of BWCE extending the proposed Homewood Solar Farm beyond its current boundary, should future grid capacity or land in the vicinity become available. This has never been our intention, and we have produced a statement to this effect, which can be viewed in full here.