

Fairy Hill Solar Project Community Consultation & Follow Up Actions March 2022

Introduction

Between 6th November and 12th December 2021 Bath & West Community Energy (BWCE) and Zero Carbon Compton (ZCC) carried out a community consultation on a proposed solar energy project in the Fairy Hill area of Compton Dando.

The proposed project is a 2.1MW ground mounted solar array, consisting of 4264 solar panels on an area of approx. 4.5 acres (around 2.5 football pitches). If developed, the project would generate energy equivalent to the annual electricity demand of 580 homes and would cut carbon emissions by 508 tonnes of CO₂ per year (equivalent to 1180 people's annual driving emissions).

In addition to responding to the climate emergency the proposed project would be expected to bring significant benefits to the Compton Dando community, including:

- Up to £5,000 per year community benefit funding for local community projects reducing carbon emissions and fuel poverty.
- Up to 53% biodiversity net gain at the site (meaning an increase in natural habitat and ecological features).
- The planting of a new community orchard with the possibility of other new community amenities.

How we consulted the community

The consultation comprised of the following activities:

- A leaflet publicising the consultation was delivered door to door in Compton Dando village.
- The consultation was publicised by Zero Carbon Compton and Compton Dando Community Association.
- A consultation website was launched on 6th November.
- A consultation survey was launched on 6th November with 12th December as the deadline for responses.
- A consultation preview meeting was held with Compton Dando Parish Council on 8th November.
- Zero Carbon Compton ran a Youth consultation event on 22nd November (13 attended). At this it was suggested that a youth green group for Compton Dando should be set up.
- A drop in consultation event was held from 2.30pm to 9pm on 23rd November (47 attended).
- Three door knocking sessions were carried out on Fairy Hill estate on 6th November, 30th November and 8th December.

Consultation Survey results

We had 130 survey responses. 70% were in support of the proposal.

We received the following responses to the question 'How do you feel about our proposed plans for the Fairy Hill solar project?'

Strongly support	48%	63 responses
Support	22%	28 responses
Neither support or against	5%	7 responses
Against	4%	5 responses
Strongly against	21%	27 responses

See the [Consultation Results](#).

Of the 91 people who responded either 'strongly support' or 'support', 49 made comments. A number of themes emerged as the reasons for supporting the project. These included the following (with some people expressing more than one of these):

- The urgency of taking action on the climate crisis (9 comments)
- The importance of increasing green/renewable/sustainable energy (12 comments) and local energy generation (3 comments).
- The importance of us all taking responsibility for climate action (8 comments), especially as a local community (13 comments) with Compton Dando setting an example to other communities (2 comments)
- The feeling that it was a reasonable location (7 comments)

Of the 32 people who responded 'strongly against' or 'against', 31 made comments. Their reasons for being against the proposal can be broken down as follows:

- Proximity to houses/the village and visual impact (19 comments)
- Impact on wildlife (3 comments)
- Impact on farmland (2 comments)
- Planning concerns e.g. industrial development, incursion on Green Belt (3 comments)
- The existence of solar farms nearby (3 comments)
- That it would not benefit Compton Dando (1 comment)

A number of questions were raised in the consultation survey.

- Some of these are addressed below.
- Some are answered in the [Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- Other questions will be answered in further communications during the next stage of project development.

24 respondents made suggestions for improving biodiversity or community amenities at the site. The feasibility of these suggestions will be reviewed during the next stage of project development.

41 respondents made suggestions for how Compton Dando could use the community benefit funding (from surplus income if the project goes ahead). These have been forwarded onto representatives of Zero Carbon Compton, Compton Dando Community Association and Compton Dando Parish Council.

Improving the impact of the project and addressing concerns raised in the consultation

We are pleased that there is 70% support for the project. However, 25% were against the project with the majority of these stating visual impact and proximity to the village as the main reasons for this. We understand these concerns, and we want to ensure that we develop this project with the community and adapt our plans as best we can.

To address some of the concerns raised in the consultation, especially from those residents closest to the site, we have implemented the following actions:

1. We have proposed a new layout for the solar panels which moves the array further into the field in order to:
 - a. Prevent views from Chewton Road up the hill.
 - b. Minimise visual impact angle from both east and west.
 - c. Move the access road to go around the edge rather than straight across the field, allowing trees to be planted between the entrance gate and the solar array.
 - d. Make more room for new planting between the solar array and Chewton Road.
2. We are exploring how we can increase the screening to minimise the visual impact from key viewpoints. This includes the possibility of planting trees to replace the dying elms between the site and the Fairy Hill Estate.
3. We have commissioned further viewpoint photos to reflect the proposed layout changes and to show more fully what will be seen (if anything at all) of the panels from both nearby houses and long-distance viewpoints.

New viewpoint photographs reflecting the new panel layout and screening options can be viewed [HERE](#).

4. We have started discussing with Curo how we can collaborate to enable the scrubland they own near to the Fairy Hill estate to be brought into use as a

community amenity. If we can manage this extra bit of land as part of the overall land management of the solar site this could offer additional community benefit to residents closest to the array.

5. As part of the next stage of development we will be reviewing suggestions made in the consultation responses on how we can increase community amenity and access on the solar site.

An offer of a meeting for Fairy Hill residents

In a newsletter delivered to residents on the Fairy Hill estate on 17th December we offered the possibility (Covid allowing) of a meeting in January for those people closest to the proposed site to update them on our response to their concerns. We asked residents to complete a short online survey to let us know:

- Whether they would attend such a meeting
- When they would be able to attend a meeting (with weekday morning/afternoon/evening and Saturday morning/afternoon options)
- What key issues the meeting should cover

Unfortunately, nobody completed the survey or contacted us by any other means, so this meeting did not take place.

Responses to some key questions

Here are answers to some questions raised in consultation responses and during discussions on the doorstep with Fairy Hill estate residents on 30th November and 8th December.

Why are we doing this?	We need to move away from fossil fuel burning which is contributing to climate change. This means we need to significantly increase the amount of renewable energy generation over the next decade or so.
Why Compton Dando?	To get the amount of renewable energy required every community will need to do its bit. We are working closely with Zero Carbon Compton, who are keen for Compton Dando to contribute to addressing the climate crisis and improve the local environment. But it's not just Compton Dando. BWCE are also working in several other communities to develop renewable projects.
Why this site?	This site has not been chosen at random. A good site for solar power requires a balance of factors including size, slope of land, supportive landowner, closeness to electricity

	<p>grid connection, affordable grid connections costs, land grade, management of visual impact and ease of access to site. Potential sites locally are very limited, but we believe that Fairy Hill is a good site for a community solar farm because it ticks nearly all of these boxes.</p>
<p>Why BWCE?</p>	<p>We are not a commercial developer - we are a Community Benefit Society. Our projects are developed in partnership with the community and surplus income from projects goes back into the community to improve the environment and alleviate fuel poverty. Over the next few years Bath & North East Somerset will need a big increase in renewable energy generation. We believe doing it through the BWCE community model provides a better deal for communities than through the traditional commercial model.</p>
<p>Who will make money from the solar farm?</p>	<p>The community will!</p> <p>BWCE is a not-for-profit community business which means that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the Fairy Hill solar project is installed and has a successful year, surplus income will go back to Compton Dando via the community benefit fund. • BWCE raises money from local people throughout our area, including Compton Dando, to build projects. • People who choose to buy community shares become BWCE members and control the organisation on a one member, one vote basis. • All members receive annual interest payments, subject to project performance and capped at 4% for new shares. • Our non-executive Board Directors are elected by the membership, are voluntary and receive no payment.
<p>Why can't we sell electricity direct to residents?</p>	<p>We would love to sell the electricity generated by the solar farm to local residents, but current energy supply regulations do not allow us to do this. We and many others are continuing to lobby government and the regulator OFGEM to change this. However, the installation of the solar array on the local grid will mean that the renewable electricity generated will go directly to local houses and community buildings, even if currently this is not reflected in the way you pay for your electricity.</p>

What happens next?

Due to the level of support expressed in the consultation, we have made a further grant application to the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) to cover the costs involved in carrying out further survey work and submitting a planning application, which would happen in May/June, subject to funding

During this next stage we will continue to develop our plans for improving the impact of the project, addressing the concerns raised in the consultation and exploring the viability of suggestions made for increasing community amenity and access on the solar site.

Further consultation will take place prior to a planning application, including a community meeting/drop-in event to discuss our plans for improving impact and maximising community benefit.

We would welcome any further comments or questions you have, especially if your level of support for this project has changed in any way since the consultation and after reading this information.

Please email communitysolar2020@bwce.coop