

November 2023



**Bath & West
Community Energy**
Generating local energy

Community Involvement Statement

Fairy Hill Community Solar Farm

Summary

This Statement of Community Involvement has been prepared in support of a planning application for a new solar energy project in the Fairy Hill area of Compton Dando.

The proposed project is a 2.1MW ground mounted solar array, consisting of 4,264 solar panels on an area of approx. 4.5 acres. 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 120% biodiversity net gain at the site (meaning an increase in natural habitat and ecological features over time).
- The planting of a new community orchard with the possibility of other new community amenities.

Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement provides a summary of the pre-application and ongoing consultation and communication with stakeholders for the proposed community-owned solar farm at Fairy Hill, Compton Dando. It has been prepared in support of a planning application for the new solar farm, on behalf of Bath & West Community Energy (BWCE). BWCE is a not for profit Community Benefit Society, operating and growing successfully since 2010, with a focus on developing clean local energy projects that actively involve and benefit communities in Bath and surrounding areas.

Aims and objectives of Community Engagement

As a community business set up to benefit the local community, BWCE believes that community partnership is central to the success of renewable energy development. As such, BWCE have attempted to engage the local community and stakeholders to the best of our ability throughout the feasibility stage of the project and will continue this engagement throughout the planning application stage and construction and operational phases should the project be granted planning permission.

Our aims of the Community Consultation were:

1. To promote the positive elements of the proposed development
2. To challenge any myths, rumours and negative perceptions about the proposed development.
3. To address any concerns local stakeholders have about the proposed development.
4. To identify issues to the development that we may have missed.
5. To identify and address issues raised those opposed to the development.
6. To tap into any local knowledge that might be helpful for the development and construction stages.
7. To build a supporter base for the project (including potential community investment).



8. To meet the expectations of the B&NES Council planning process.
9. To establish, nurture and maintain relationships with the community for the duration of the solar project.
10. To maintain (and enhance) the reputation of BWCE and local partners.

Overview of consultation activities

Between 6th November – 12th December 2021 BWCE and Zero Carbon Compton carried out a community consultation for the proposed solar farm. 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. See www.bwce.coop/fairy-hill
- A **consultation survey** was launched on 6th November with 12th December as the deadline for responses (130 responded)
- 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 the Fairy Hill estate (homes in nearest proximity to the proposed solar farm) on 6th November, 30th November and 8th December.
- A **newsletter** was delivered to the Fairy Hill estate (homes in nearest proximity to the proposed solar farm) on 17th December outlining action taken by BWCE to address some of the concerns raised in the consultation. In this we offered to hold a meeting with residents on the estate but nobody took up this offer.
- A second **newsletter** was delivered via email and post (with the support of Zero Carbon Compton) to ensure it reached everyone who took part in March 2022. This reported on the results of the consultation and again outlined actions taken by BWCE to address some of the concerns raised in the consultation.
- Following the consultation a **site visit** with members of the local community to explore potential amenities on the site was held on 11th August 2022 (16 attended).
- A public meeting was offered as a further opportunity for community consultation on the project but no-one took up the opportunity at that time



Consultation Survey Results

BWCE received 130 responses to the consultation survey, 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

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. A portion of these have been addressed in the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section on the BWCE website and in the follow up actions report issued following this consultation. It is planned that the remaining 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.

Outcome

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 have listened to and understand these concerns, and 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.
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.

Community site visit

On 11th August 2022 BWCE hosted a community site visit and walkaround the Fairy Hill site. This visit allowed the local community to see the site in person, understand where the solar farm would be located and discuss ideas relating to possible future amenity of the surrounding land with representatives from BWCE and Engain. 16 local residents attended.

The general comments from the attendees were as follows:

- Important that any amenity idea for the land had an easy exit strategy if people who are engaged in it move on or lose interest.
- Provide access and facilities for the elderly and those with disabilities, there are lots of these people in the local community. This may be in the form of road entrance and parking.
- Check if there would be any issues for nearby residents from any lights from the proposed satellite mast.

- Use of local contractors for maintenance of any amenity on the solar site e.g. trees and/or hedgerows.

In addition to the general comments above members of the community who attended the site visit formulated a variety of ideas for increasing the amenity of the land surrounding the proposed solar project. A sample of these ideas have been outlined below:

- Tree and hedgerow planting focusing on native species.
- Integration of edible shrubs and/or an allotment to encourage foraging, wildlife and people to grow produce.
- Educational items in the form of noticeboards (possibly with QR codes) informing people of solar array and how it functions, wildlife camera feed, nature based information board, river flow monitoring and a sensory path.
- Biodiversity items, such as:
 - Wildflower strip
 - Wild growing areas
 - Otter habitat
 - Beehives
- Rhododendron and azaleas ornamental zone
- Natural picnic area

Outcome

The majority of the comments and feedback received during the community site visit revolved around land amenity and how to utilise it for the local residents. Considering the feedback and ideas received we produced an amenity planning map which can be viewed in the appendix. The amenity map includes designated areas of hedgerow and tree planting, a sensory path, pedestrian track and proposed locations for educational boards which would provide information on the solar farm accompanied by QR codes and viewpoints. The amenity map was shared with the site visit participants for feedback, no further changes or comments were received following this.

Key community stakeholder engagement

Group contacted	How/When contacted
Potential 'advocates/champions'	<p>Worked in partnership with members of Zero Carbon Compton (ZCC)</p> <p>ZCC volunteers supported the drop-in consultation event in November 2021</p> <p>16 supporters attended the site visit in August 2022</p>
Residents closest to the proposed development	<p>Leafletted to promote the consultation</p> <p>3 door knocking sessions Nov/Dec 2022</p> <p>Newsletter outlining action taken by BWCE to address some of the concerns raised in the consultation delivered to them in Dec 22</p>
Parish councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <p>Consultation preview meeting held with them in Nov 22</p>
B&NES Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alastair Singleton • Duncan Hounsell <p>Informed via email prior to consultation period. Follow up telephone conversation with Cllr Singleton</p>
Members of Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacob Rees Mogg MP
Key local organisation e.g.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools • Community and voluntary organisations • Residents' associations <p>Zero Carbon Compton a partner in the project</p> <p>Compton Dando Community Association informed throughout</p>
Statutory Consultees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <p>Parish Council (see above) B&NES Councillors (see above)</p>

Outcome

A range of key community stakeholders were engaged through a variety of consultation methods and communicate channels including leafletting, a community site visit and drop-in session.

Feedback from the people and groups engaged was mostly positive recognising the benefits to the local community, utilisation of land to increase public amenity and clean energy generation in relation to responding to the climate crisis. The concerns from the key community stakeholders

raised during the consultations revolved round the potential viewpoints of the project and use and access of the public amenity areas. To address the viewpoint concerns BWCE proposed a new layout for the solar array and commissioned further viewpoint photographs to reflect the layout changes and viewpoints from other long-distance viewpoints. On the amenity concerns, BWCE discussed with Curo how to collaborate to enable the use of scrubland for community amenity and produced an amenity planning map based off suggestions from stakeholders to increase community amenity and access during consultations.

Ongoing engagement

To continue their community engagement strategy BWCE are amalgamating suggestions made in consultation and site visit responses on how to increase biodiversity and community amenity and ideas which could be funded by the project community benefit fund. The consultation and site visit suggestions relate to a variety of subjects including: tree and hedgerow planting, food growing, education and interpretation, environmental resilience, energy efficiency, sustainable transport and improving and maintaining the village environment. The viability of these suggestions is being reviewed and actions to move them forward are being formulated and integrated into discussions as the feasibility process progresses.

Following the completion of the viability review and action formulation BWCE are looking to determine a proposal, costing, landowner and seek Zero carbon Compton feedback and ideas for community involvement for each viable suggestion.

Conclusion

The local community has been and will continue to be actively engaged through the development of the project and their feedback and comments considered into the project where viable.

This report outlines the results of initial community consultation which shows overall local support for the development proposal. Where there have been specific concerns raised about landscape impact, land amenity and wildlife, efforts have been made to understand and respond to the concerns by implementation of a suggestions based approach that has been taken to ensure the impact of the proposed development on landscape, land use and wildlife is properly considered and minimised.

BWCE's community engagement plan will be continued throughout the formulation and submission of the planning application and construction and operation phases if planning permission is granted, to ensure the benefits of the project to the Compton Dando community are clear.

Appendices

- Leaflet promoting the consultation
- Consultation survey
- Display board layouts
- Survey report
- Newsletter delivered to Fairy Hill residents (December 2021)

November 2023



**Bath & West
Community Energy**
Generating local energy

- Newsletter delivered to Fairy Hill residents (March 2022)
- Amenity planning map