

Formal Representation – Gislingham Parish Council

EcoPower Suffolk Solar Farm – Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP)

To: Planning Inspectorate

Date: 12th August 2026

From: Gislingham Parish Council

1. Introduction

Gislingham Parish Council submits this report to the Planning Inspectorate regarding the proposed EcoPower Suffolk NSIP solar farm. The Council wishes to formally record concerns raised by residents, outline anticipated impacts on the community, and request that the promoter revisits several aspects of the proposal to ensure that the development is proportionate, responsible, and sensitive to the needs of Gislingham.

The Council has received extensive feedback from residents who are dissatisfied with the revised plans presented during consultation. There is a strong perception locally that the cumulative effect of multiple NSIP schemes around the village—combined with the scale of the proposed solar farm—will have a significant and lasting impact on Gislingham’s rural character, amenity, and daily life.

Residents have also expressed concern that the proposed community fund is insufficient and does not reflect the level of disruption expected. Many feel that the offer resembles a “sweetener” rather than a meaningful mitigation package.

2. Consultation Process Concerns

Residents and the Parish Council consider the consultation process inadequate. The consultation period was short, overlapped with public holidays, and key information events were held after the consultation opened, limiting meaningful engagement.

Technical documents provided by the promoter were difficult to interpret and perceived as biased. Residents felt that “worthy critics within our communities” were denied the opportunity to contribute effectively due to inaccessible information and compressed timelines.

The Council requests that future consultation stages provide:

- Longer response periods.
- Clear, accessible documentation.
- Early scheduling of public information events.

- Direct engagement with the Parish Council as the representative body for Gislingham.

3. Landscape and Visual Impact

The proposed development will introduce substantial and irreversible visual change to the landscape surrounding Gislingham. Large-scale solar arrays positioned on the edge of the village, combined with the National Grid pylon project on the main approach into Gislingham, create a cumulative effect that transforms the village's rural setting.

Instead of being a village surrounded by open countryside, Gislingham risks becoming visually enclosed by industrial-scale energy infrastructure. This concentration of infrastructure would significantly erode the village's traditional rural character, replacing long-established agricultural views with solar panels, fencing, and overhead transmission structures.

The Council considers the current siting too close to the settlement boundary. Relocating infrastructure further from the village would reduce visual intrusion, preserve key views, and maintain the sense of openness that defines Gislingham's landscape.

The Council requests:

- Stronger visual mitigation.
- Enhanced screening and planting, emphasising that the quality of trees and hedges must be high. They expect mature trees rather than low-budget or undersized planting to ensure effective long-term screening and landscape integration.
- Greater separation between infrastructure and residential areas.

4. Construction Traffic, Road Safety, and Disturbance

The construction phase is likely to generate significantly increased heavy vehicle movements through or near Gislingham. The village is served by narrow rural roads not designed for sustained HGV use. Any requirement for road widening would itself cause landscape harm, hedgerow loss, and permanent change to rural character.

Residents would experience noise, dust, vibration, and general disturbance, particularly during groundworks and intensive construction periods. These impacts are especially concerning given the proximity of key school routes and pedestrian pathways.

The Council requests a detailed Construction Traffic Management Plan including:

- Defined HGV routing that avoids sensitive village areas.
- Restrictions on HGV movements during school travel times.

- Monitoring and reinstatement of any road damage.
- Clear safety measures for pedestrians, horseriders, and cyclists.
- Installation of anti-glare/glinton technology and acoustic barriers where inverter stations or other equipment may generate noise.

5. Access Routes and Long-Term Traffic Implications

The Council requests clarity on access routes for both construction and operational phases. Long-term maintenance traffic could place ongoing pressure on rural lanes currently used as safe, low-traffic community routes.

The Council seeks assurance that:

- No permanent road widening will be required.
- Hedgerows and verges will be protected.
- Operational traffic will be minimised and controlled.
- A defined maximum setback distance must be agreed for all solar panels to protect amenity, maintain rural views, prevent enclosure of neighbouring properties, and ensure safe off-road space for pedestrians and dog walkers.
- School routes and pedestrian pathways will be safeguarded.
- A named Suffolk Highways officer will be designated to rapidly address traffic or road safety issues caused by construction vehicles.

6. Ecology, Flooding, and Long-Term Land Management

The Council seeks firm commitments regarding ecological management throughout the project's lifespan, including:

- Mandatory buffer zones around all solar panel areas, including mature shrubs, trees, and wildflower meadows, to provide habitat protection and effective screening. The Palgrave experience with inadequate contractor delivery should be treated as a warning.
- Maintenance of screening and planting.
- Habitat creation and biodiversity enhancement.
- Protection and improvement of the River Dove and its tributaries.
- Flood mitigation measures, given severe flooding experienced in 2024.
- Prevention of industrial pollution from surface water runoff.

- Clarification of who will own, operate, and maintain the solar farm for the next 40 years, including responsibility for safety, compliance, community engagement, and decommissioning.

The landscape around Gislingham has a fragile natural drainage system. Disruption caused by solar panel installation, fencing, and associated infrastructure risks worsening flooding and introducing pollution.

A comprehensive decommissioning strategy is essential, including full land restoration once the project reaches the end of its operational life.

Other local developments have already raised concerns about the lack of maintenance across sites. Damaged screening has not been replaced, and the absence of watering—combined with recent dry weather—means that very few plants have taken, with no sign of meaningful growth to date.

It is difficult to understand why reasonable-sized hedging was not planted in the locations that most directly affect neighbouring households, given the sensitivity of those areas and the clear impact on residents.

Biodiversity is of fundamental importance, and while green renewable energy sources are essential, the project must also deliver measurable ecological improvements. This includes strengthened woodland planting, restored hedgerows, and enhanced habitat connectivity to ensure that renewable energy generation does not come at the expense of local wildlife and natural systems.

7. Questions for MSDC, SCC and the MP

Residents request clarity on the following matters:

7.1 Corporate Incentives and UK Benefit

Ecoenergy appears to be an Israeli-owned company. The Council requests clarification on:

- What grants, tax breaks, or incentives have been provided by the UK Government.
- What guaranteed price (if any) has been agreed for electricity exported to the national grid.
- Whether any British companies bid for the contract, and on what basis Ecoenergy was selected.
- Are local people are being employed to carry out the works, and whether the project will generate any employment or training opportunities for young people in the area.

- There appears to be a large number of solar farm bids for Waveney valley agricultural land. How many bids are there and what is the total area they will consume if successful. How does this compare with other similar areas in Suffolk/Norfolk.
- How does the amount of energy created by solar compare with #other sources of electricity generated by nuclear power stations/wind farms/bio.

7.2 Scale of Solar Applications in the Region

- How many solar panel sites are currently being applied for in this region (as per the Planning Officer spreadsheet).
- Whether these applications are all from individual private companies.
- Whether this volume of applications is being replicated in other parts of the country.

7.3 Local Economic Benefit and Supply Chain

- Whether construction will use local labour and contractors, supporting employment opportunities for young people.
- Whether solar panels and associated infrastructure are being imported or sourced and manufactured locally within Suffolk/Norfolk.

8. Battery Storage, Water Supply, and Infrastructure on Every Field

Residents have raised concerns about the lack of clear information regarding:

- Siting of battery storage facilities.
- Water cooling systems.
- Water supply sources during drought periods.
- Fire hazard mitigation.
- The need for a single BESS compound in Area 5 rather than multiple smaller units across fields, reducing fire risk, maintenance traffic, and community disruption.

Given chronic under-investment in local water infrastructure, the Council requests detailed clarification on these matters.

9. Impact on Residential Amenity and Local Character

Residents have expressed serious concerns that the proposed solar farm will negatively affect nearby properties through:

- Loss of rural outlook.

- Reduced enjoyment of homes and gardens.
- Perception of industrialisation.
- Potential impacts on property desirability.

While property valuation is not a planning consideration, the perceived loss of amenity contributes significantly to community opposition and distress.

The Council requests stronger visual mitigation measures, including enhanced screening and planting.

10. Mental Health and Wellbeing

Feedback indicates that the scale of the project, the cumulative effect of multiple NSIPs, and the anticipated long-term change to the landscape are causing significant stress, anxiety, and uncertainty within the community.

The Council requests that EcoPower Suffolk:

- Acknowledge the psychological burden placed on residents.
- Provide clear, accessible information throughout the project lifecycle.
- Adopt wellbeing-focused mitigation measures.
- Engage meaningfully with those most affected.

Mental health impacts must be recognised within the overall assessment of community harm.

11. Consultation Quality and Engagement

Residents appreciate that consultation meetings and materials have been provided, but many have still experienced:

- Unclear information.
- Difficult-to-access content.
- Very short notice for key events.

The Council requests consistent, transparent engagement throughout the planning and development process, with all meetings and consultations advertised well in advance.

The Council expects:

- Regular updates.
- Clear opportunities for residents to raise concerns.
- Proactive sharing of information.

- Direct, ongoing communication with the Parish Council.
- Appointment of a single independent point of contact to liaise with residents throughout construction and operation.

12. Community Benefit Package

The Council noted that the proposed community fund of £125,000 per annum would reduce considerably over the lifetime of the project. It was felt that each parish should have its own dedicated pot of funding, distributed directly for the benefit of local residents. The Council does not consider the proposed community fund proportionate to the scale of the development; the offer of £125,000 per year for four years, shared across all affected parishes, is insufficient and does not reflect the level of impact on local communities.

Residents have suggested several improvements, including:

- Extending the Gislingham Edge route to the railway line.
- Positioning the solar panels further away from nearby homes to reduce visual impact and protect residential amenity.
- Providing free or heavily subsidised electricity for households most affected.
- Developing a meaningful compensation package that reflects the scale of impact.
-

The Parish Council requests that the promoter revisits the community benefit package and engages directly with the Council to develop a more appropriate and locally relevant offer.

13. Conclusion

Gislingham Parish Council requests that all concerns outlined in this report are fully addressed, that mitigation measures are strengthened, and that the proposed community benefit package is significantly improved to reflect the scale of impact on the village.

The Council reserves the right to submit further comments as additional information becomes available and expects continued, proactive engagement as the project progresses.