

Mendlesham Parish Council
Stoke Ash and Thwaite Parish Council
Wickham Skeith Parish Council

Enquiries to: Phil Watson Strategic Energy
Projects Manager

Email: phil.watson@suffolk.gov.uk

Date: 10/05/2025

Dear Parish Councillors,

White Elm Solar Farm – Non-statutory consultation –19th May to 30th June 2025

I am writing to you regarding the initial Public Consultation for White Elm Solar Farm.

What is being proposed?

The project comprises the construction, operation and maintenance of a grid connected solar PV generating station, together with battery energy storage system (BESS).

The site is located in the parishes of Mendlesham, Wickham Skeith and Thwaite. The site lies west of the A140 and extends to approximately 675 acres.

The applicant has a 300MW AC Import/Export connection offer has been obtained from National Grid into a 400kV transmission system with an estimated connection date for 2031.

The proposed development would connect to *existing* grid infrastructure through a new substation with the exact substation location still to be determined by National Grid. The substation shown on the consultation material is the project substation which consolidates the power from the panels and batteries.

A new National Grid (NGET) substation will be located elsewhere and is likely to be close to the *existing* Norwich to Bramford pylon line. The location of the new NGET substation is not included in this consultation.

The Applicant has stated that the connection is not associated with the National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project.

<https://www.whiteelmsolarfarm.com/>

<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN0110003>

The Role of the County Council

Suffolk County Council is not the decision maker for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP), consented under the Planning Act 2008. Energy projects such as this proposal are decided by the Secretary of State at the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero, currently the Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP.

The County Council, as well as the District Councils, are only Statutory Consultees in the process. Therefore, while we have an important role in the process, the ultimate decision on whether to consent or refuse the application is one for government.

The role of Parish Councils and information to support them

I wanted to highlight the information that is now available to support Parish and Town Councils, and to highlight some key issues and actions that would be appropriate for you to consider at this point in the process.

It is important to recognise the status of town and parish councils in the consenting of NSIPs. **Relevant parish and town councils are statutory consultees** in the Nationally Significant Infrastructure planning process, as set out in the list of prescribed consultees in Schedule 1 of the *Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009*.

Guidance on the NSIP process, specifically tailored for Town and Parish Councils, has been prepared by Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC).

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/major-infrastructure-projects-including-nsips/nationally-significant-infrastructure-project-nsip-information/nsip-information-for-town-and-parish-councils>

<https://www.salc.org.uk/national-strategic-infrastructure-projects-nsips>

The need for early and ongoing engagement with the project promoter

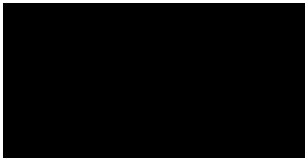
Notwithstanding any overall objection you, or we, may have to the principle of the project and our opposition to it, it is important that we engage with the process to attempt to mitigate and minimise the impacts, should the Secretary of State grant consent. Therefore, I recommend that parish and town councils engage with the project promoter whenever possible, seeking to shape, change, and improve the project whenever the opportunity arises. It is important to recognise that this does not in any way undermine any opposition you have to the project. Such comments are made without prejudice to any objections that you may have to the scheme, either in principle, or on matters of detail, or to any campaign you may wish to mount against the project.

In the case of White Elm's proposal, I am particularly concerned by the pace with which they intend moving through consultation, to the submission of the Development Consent Order (DCO), which is akin to the formal planning application, in a little over 12 months. In light of this, the opportunity to shape and influence the project is much more limited than we have experienced with other similar projects. Therefore, it is important that we begin compiling evidence, and make requests for changes, as soon as possible.

To this end, I would be happy to meet with you either virtually or in person, to ensure that your concerns fed into how the County Council's response is shaped, as well as forming part of your own submissions. In order to have standing in the process, it is essential that you also make individual submissions as town and parish councils. The SALC guidance above sets this out in more detail.

If you consider it helpful, I look forward to meeting with you soon. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to email nsips@suffolk.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully,



Richard Rout

Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform, and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects