



Toppesfield Parish Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 13th July 2026 at Toppesfield Village Hall at 7.00pm

26/106. Attendance and Apologies for Absence:

The following Councillors were in attendance:

Councillor Paula Edwards-Holmes - Chair
Councillor Amanda Smith
Councillor Coral Fordham
Councillor Jeremy Graves
Councillor Chris Neale
Councillor Jane Daines

Also, in attendance:

District Cllr Richard van Dulken
4 Representatives from Qualitas Energy
51 members of the public
Kaaren Berry – Clerk

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Kitty Bourlet
County Councillor Nathan Robins

26/106.1 To accept apologies from members of the council

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Bourlet who was unable to attend the meeting due to family commitments.

26/107. Declaration of Members' interests in agenda items

Cllr Edwards-Holmes declared an interest in agenda point 118.1 Land to the West of The Causeway due to it being behind her property. No other declarations of interests were made.

26/108. Presentation by representatives from Qualitas Energy re Robin Hood End Solar Farm Project.

The Qualitas team introduced themselves before talking through the presentation packs which had been handed out at the meeting, a copy of which can be found in Appendix B. The team responded to questions from the public and councillors as they went through the presentation.

Points raised included:

- They are not in a position to share the design at present, when the design is completed the impacts of this will be assessed.
- They are gathering information at this early stage.
- It was asked if the 60MW site will take up all available capacity of the lines. The district network operator does not give out this information, so this is not known by Qualitas.
- At present Qualitas are looking at assessing the human impact and includes traffic, public rights of way, properties as well as landscape, loss of farmland and wildlife. It was mentioned that the traffic impact assessment has not been completed at this time. But during the 15 – 18-month construction period there is expected to be 15 vehicles a day then this will reduce to approximately 4 per month. They did confirm that when the traffic impact assessment is completed they would share this publicly.

- A team representative from Qualitas confirmed she has walked the site, and colleagues have driven the access routes.
- It was asked how consultation with the community has taken place. Qualitas confirmed that they sent out 180 letters over the various parishes, to those we are closest to the site, written to parish councils and held a webinar. However, this was challenged by some residents as it was felt that letters should have been sent to all residents and Qualitas should have set these meetings up and not left it to the Parish Councils or residents to set up meetings and inform others.
- It was questioned as to why the investment fund could not but used to put solar panels on houses to avoid upsetting local communities. Qualitas stated that the government put these types of projects out for tender and there are some companies that do solar panels on houses and businesses, but that Qualitas's business model is to put solar panels on agricultural land.
- A member of the public commented that Public Rights of Way can remain on paper, but they are not necessarily safe. Qualitas confirmed that the bridleway on the proposed site will be protected and kept safe.
- There were lots of concerns raised about contamination of the land, the clean up after the 40-year lease period, traffic issues, bridleways, footpaths, communications about the consultation process and the impact on the rural community. Even if Qualitas were to clean up the site, there would still be debris including glass in the land that would affect future farming.
- Qualitas stated that if the planning application, when submitted, was refused depending on the reason for refusal they would appeal the decision and if the appeal was refused then they would go straight to the Government for support.
- It was asked what limits are put on for other projects if Qualitas' project went ahead. Qualitas are not aware of any limitations as it depends on the capacity of the network.
- It was confirmed that the power generated goes to the grid and not for local supply.
- It was asked why this site has been chosen. The response was that there are connections on site, there is spare capacity on the lines, land is available, and it is a suitable site in principle.

The chair of the meeting then read out the following email from Mr & Mrs McMurtie:

Chairman, councillors — we are Mr & Mrs J McMurtrie of Robin Hood Farm, and our home sits at the very centre of Robin Hood End. Let us be clear: we are not against renewable energy. We are against 276 acres of our best Grade 2 farmland being industrialised for 40 years, chosen not on merit but because Qualitas Energy followed a power line on a map and found two landowners willing to take their money. We are against up to 30-50 HGVs a day on our narrow roads and lanes with no footpaths, roads where a child has already died on a bicycle, roads we ride our horses on every single day. We are against the loss of confirmed Great Crested Newts, otters and skylarks, the harm to our listed heritage, and the flooding that takes our grazing and at its worst causes immeasurable flooding to Finchingfield.

At the public meeting on the eighth of July, around a hundred residents were asked if a single one of them supported this development. Not one hand went up. Not one. This community is united, not against clean energy, but against the wrong project, on the wrong land, forced upon us in the wrong way. We respectfully ask Toppesfield Parish Council to record its formal objection and to convey it to Braintree District Council. Please stand with your community in defence of our safety, our farmland, our wildlife, our heritage, and the rural character of this beautiful corner of Essex. Do not allow Qualitas Energy to over industrialise our homes. Thank you for giving our voice a hearing tonight, even in our absence.

The chair thanked Qualitas for attending and responding to the many questions that were asked and stated to the audience any further questions can be directed directly to Qualitas or emailed to the clerk who will pass them onto Qualitas for a response. The chair also requested that people could send further comments to the Parish Council, and we will collate these and share with the other parishes as well as Qualitas if appropriate.

Qualitas and many members of the public then left the meeting.

26/109. Open Session – opportunity for members of the Parish to address the Parish Council.

Cllr Richard van Dulken reported:

- That he has been elected by the Council as its Chairman for the 2026/7 Civic Year.
- Wethersfield - as residents will no doubt be aware, unfortunately the anticipated closure of the migrant centre in mid 2027 has been postponed by national government, with now no date of closure promised and an increase in residents from maximum of 800 to maximum of 1,245. Braintree DC and Sir James Cleverly have objected strongly.
- Church fete - it was my pleasure to be involved on the Local Art Exhibition stand in the Church as well as attending in my chairman role.
- Local Government Reorganisation - despite announcements by the Essex County Council administration, BDC is continuing its work with Colchester, Tendring and ECC officers towards the creation of Northeast Essex Unitary Council in 2028.
- The financial position of BDC is positive at the end of the 2025/6 Financial Year, with a positive £2.1 million variance which has allowed us to freeze the BDC portion of Council Tax for the current year.
- The updated Local Plan needs to be presented to the Planning Inspectorate by end of December. As residents are aware there are no significant impacts on the Toppesfield/Stambourne/Gainsford End area.
- I note the recent planning application for a single house off the Causeway - 26/00765/FUL - which appears to be outside the village envelope.
- Waste and recycling - the initial month of the new arrangements has gone relatively smoothly, and residual waste tonnage is down (good) while all elements of recycling are up (also good). We are of course aware of some issues such as capacity and this will be reviewed in a couple of months by which time residents will be used to the new system and when clear patterns and volumes are established.
- Please ensure that applications are forthcoming for grants from the Councillors' Community Grant.

26/110. To approve and sign the minutes of the Toppesfield Parish Council Meeting held on 4th June 2026 and 2nd July 2026.

Cllr Neale proposed the minutes for the meeting held on 4th June 2026 were agreed and Cllr Fordham seconded this. Cllr Edwards-Holmes proposed the minutes for the meeting held on 2nd July 2026 were agreed and Cllr Fordham seconded this. The minutes of both meetings were then signed as a true record of the meetings.

26/111. Matters Arising not on the agenda – for report only

There were no matters arising.

26/112. Actions from previous meeting:

- 26/112.1 Cllr Graves to obtain costs for the VE Day bench pad in the Churchyard. Cllr Graves needs to find out the size of the bench in order to progress the pad for it. A £50 budget was agreed for the pad work.
- 26/112.2 Cllr Edwards-Holmes to contact firms for costs to address all issues raised on the RoSPA reports. This was deferred to the next parish council meeting. Information sent to councillors for review.
- 26/112.3 Cllr Graves to look at setting up a charity bank account. No progress – hold over to next meeting.
- 26/112.4 Cllr Smith to obtain quotes for fencing the wildflower area for the school. School to mark out the area before a quote can be obtained.
- 26/112.5 Clerk to follow up with Essex County Council (ECC) re the footpath from Camoise Close to the Church. Response has been received but this is a low priority for ECC. Footpath will be monitored. An offer to concrete areas of the path has been received but due to liability issues this has not been accepted.
- 26/112.6 Cllr Fordham to enquire with a resident to see if solar lights can be put up to light the footpath. This has been agreed by residents.
- 26/112.7 Cllr Edwards-Holmes to purchase solar light for pathway from Camoise Close to the Church. Lights have been purchased and kindly installed by Paul Thompson – thanks go to Paul.
- 26/112.8 Cllr Daines to enquire who the landowner is where footpath 13 and 48 cross fields. Landowner has been identified and footpaths cleared.

26/113. Internal Practices and management for the Parish Council:

- 26/113.1 Neighbourhood Plan – comments collated from the public consultation and survey to be reviewed by the parish council and consideration if the plan needs to be revised as a consequence. To be held over to the next meeting.
- 26/113.2 Wethersfield Airfield and Asylum centre verbal update to be received – this was given by Cllr van Dulken in his report.
- 26/113.3 Feedback on Strategy document suggested actions. This was deferred to the next meeting.
- 26/113.4 Placement of grit bins in playing field update. Grit bin is in place but requires filling.
- 26/113.5 Privacy Policy & Accessibility Statement for Toppesfield Parish Council to be reviewed and considered for adoption. This is still under review, so deferred to the next meeting.
- 26/113.6 Updated Reserves Policy to be considered for adoption. This is still under review, so deferred to the next meeting.
- 26/113.7 Updated Financial Regulations to be considered for adoption. To be reviewed by councillors, deferred to the next meeting.
- 26/113.8 Ground next to the allotments and it's upkeep. The volunteers who were maintaining the grass area are no longer able to do so. Councillors agreed in principle to look to Braintree District Council to see if they can take the work on. Councillor Edwards-Holmes to progress.
- 26/113.9 Playing field equipment check lists for Toppesfield and Gainsford End. Cllr Smith has started these and is to ask for assistance if required.

26/114. Upcoming events

- 26/114.1 Christmas event – this was deferred to the next meeting.

26/115. Correspondence Received:

- 26/115.1 EALC Legal & County Updates, Essex County Council Highways Highlights, RCCE Essex Warbler - circulated to all Councillors prior to meeting.
- 26/115.2 Rural Community Council of Essex 2026 AGM will take place on **Wednesday 8th July at Rivenhall Oaks Golf Centre, Witham, CM8 2FX, commencing at 6.30pm**. In addition to the formal business, we will provide an update on RCCE's current work and will be delighted to welcome as our guest speaker, Dr Simon Lyster, Chair of the Essex Local Nature Partnership. The meeting will conclude with the announcement of the winners of this year's Essex Village of the Year and Rural Community Awards and the presentation of the prizes. Booking forms to be completed for anyone wishing to attend by 3rd July.
- 26/115.3 Request received from BASICS Essex charity for financial help towards the cost of leasing them Central Base / Office. To be considered at the next meeting.
- 26/115.4 Braintree District Volunteer and Active Braintree Awards 2026 nominations are now open. These awards recognise the individuals, groups and organisations making a positive difference across the district through volunteering, sport and physical activity, and health and wellbeing. Nominations to be submitted by 5pm on Friday 4th September 2026. The guidance document can be found at: www.braintree.gov.uk/AwardCategories2026 Councillors to review and consider at the next meeting.

26/116. Financial Accounts:

- 26/116.1 To receive the Clerk's Report indicating receipts and payments requiring approval. The report was presented and accepted. Payments as detailed in Appendix A were agreed and signed by Cllrs Neale and Fordham.
- 26/116.2 Unity trust Bank – update on progress. Cllr Graves to liaise with Cllr Bourlet re this.
- 26/116.3 Quotes for scanning past newsletters – proposal to accept and progress project. One quote has been received, other requests for quotes have not been received. It was proposed by Cllr Neale to accept the quote and Cllr Graves seconded the motion. Cllr Edwards-Holmes will collect the back issues in order to progress this.
- 26/116.4 Quote for fencing off the wildflower area in the Toppesfield playing field. Not yet received.
- 26/116.5 Electrical reports received and request for quote for required work has been requested for consideration. Clerk to push for invoice and quote for required work.

26/117 Highways:

26/117.1 Parking along Church Lane. Responses have been received in response to the letter the parish council sent to Church Lane residents regarding parking. The enforcement team response was that as there are currently no parking restrictions in place they cannot take any action. However parking restrictions could be applied for. The parish council will monitor the situation as there appears to be no clear-cut solution to the issue.

26/117.2 Update on Highway issues in Camoise Close

County Councillor has visited the close and Cllr Fordham has pointed out all the issues with the roads and footpaths. Unfortunately, these are not a priority for Highways. Issues and progress will be monitored.

26/118 Planning:

26/118.1 Planning applications for consideration and decisions by Braintree District Council as per below table.

Application No:	Description	Address	Action
26/00765/FUL	Erection of a two-storey single dwelling house with associated access, parking and private garden amenity space.	Land West of The Causeway Toppesfield Essex	Comments to Braintree District Council by 28th July 2026
CC/BTE/34/26	TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (as amended) Proposal: The retention of a class base for a temporary period without compliance with Condition 2 (time limit) attached to planning permission CC/BTE/45/21 made under Section 73.	St Margaret's C of E Primary School Church Lane Toppesfield CO9 4DS	Representations can be made via email to mineralsandwastedm@essex.gov.uk
26/00960/FUL	Proposed change of use of former agricultural buildings to holiday let accommodation and associated ancillary retail and office use.	Toppesfield Hall Great Yeldham Rd Toppesfield CO9 4LS	Braintree District Council Decision Pending Consideration
26/01110/SCR	Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 - Proposed solar farm development	Robin Hood Solar Farm Finchingfield Road Stambourne Essex	Braintree District Council Decision: Adopted

Planning application number 26/00765/FUL was discussed, and the objections raised were: the site lies outside the village envelope, loss of agricultural land in the open countryside, inadequate emergency access as noted by the Fire and Rescue Service assessment, absence of foul drainage and water supply, Flood risk, Protected trees on the site perimeter, Presence of a European protected species (crested newts) and impact on residential amenity. An objection submission will be made by the parish council.

26/118.2 Village Planning Permissions

A planning enforcement officer will be visiting a site where a planning query at a property has been raised.

26/119. Communications:

26/119.1 Newsletter for September / October 2026 – articles to be submitted by 17th August 2026.

26/119.2 Advertising local business in the newsletter. Currently charges are £15 for half a page to advertise in the newsletter per issue. Cllr Edwards-Holmes and Fordham will start to put together a list of local businesses to see if they would advertise in the newsletter.

26/120. Information exchange / Items for the next agenda

Cllr Daines asked what type of trees are required for The Causeway, it was agreed to look at Cherry trees or other types of the same size.

26/121. Date of the next meeting:

The next Parish Council Meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday 6th August 2026 at 7.30pm at Toppesfield Village Hall.

26/122. Close

Cllr Edwards-Holmes closed the meeting at 9.15pm.

Signed:

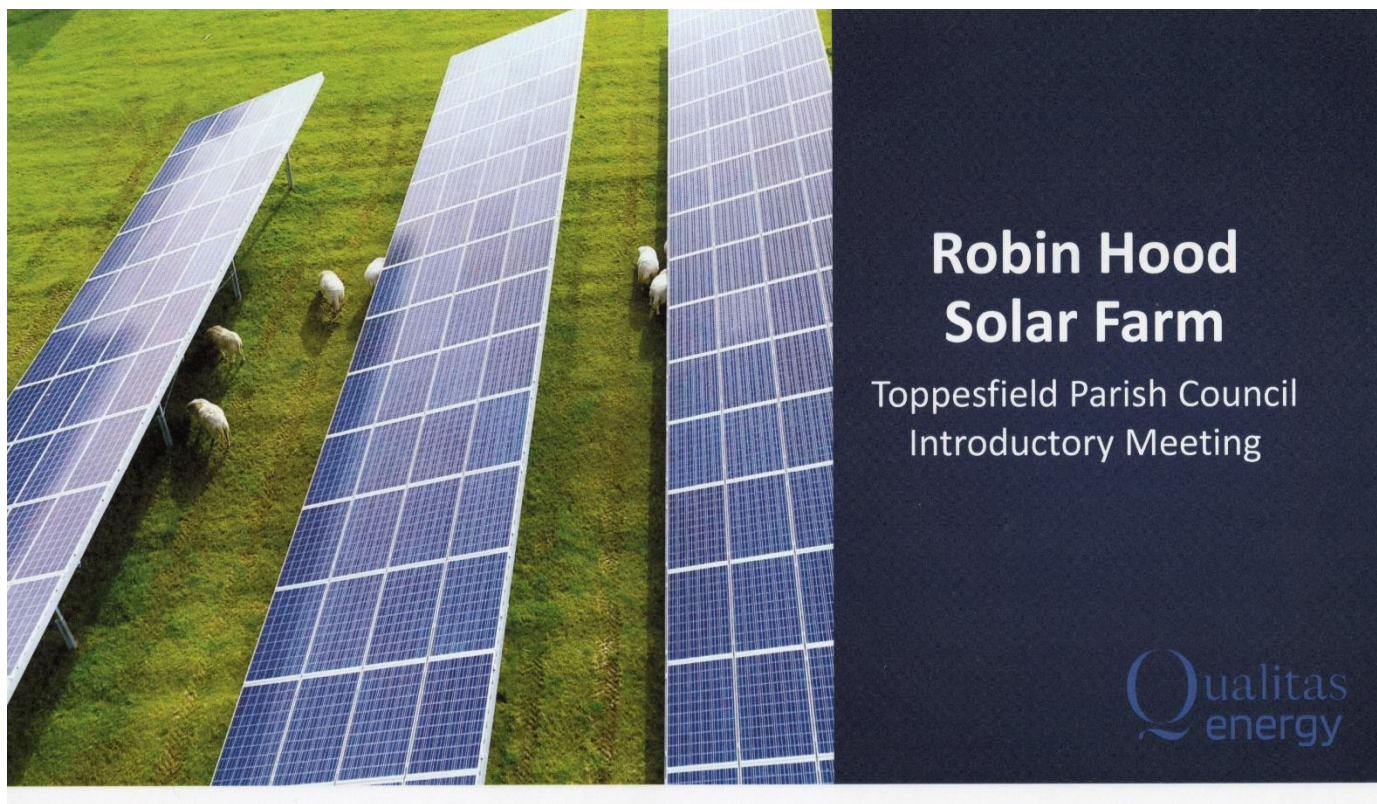
Dated:

- Cllr Graves to obtain size VE Day bench and progress pad in the Churchyard.
- All councillors to review costs of addressing issues raised by RoSPA and priorities to be made.
- Cllr Edwards-Holmes to liaise with Braintree District Council re maintaining the ground next to the allotments.

Appendix A

Accounts - 13th July 2026				
			£	
Community Account				
	Balance as at 8th July 2026		£40,121.05	
All previous authorised payments issued balance should be			£37,844.86	
Income Received Included in the balance figure of 8th July 2026				
04.06.26	Essex County Council - Grass Cutting Programme payment		£2,299.94	
			£0.00	
Direct Debits Included in the balance figure of 8th July 2026				
01.07.26	EDF - Pavilion electric		£8.00	
08.07.26	Vodafone contract		£15.75	
			£23.75	
Direct Debits to be taken this month				
			£0.00	
			£0.00	
				Unrecoverable VAT
Payments to be approved:				
Date of invoice		Payment Method		
23.06.26	Eden Print - Newsletter - July & August 2026	By Bacs	£250.00	£0.00
30.06.26	Cllr Edwards-Holmes - reimbursement for Solar lights for the footpath from Camoise to the Church	By Bacs	£59.98	£0.00
25.06.26	CouncilWise - Internal Audit 2025/2026	By Bacs	£174.00	£0.00
30.06.26	Toppesfield Village Hall Committee - Quarterly invoice	By Bacs	£307.50	£0.00
01.07.26	HMRC - Tax on June salary	By Bacs	£0.00	£0.00
01.07.26	K Berry - June salary	By Bacs	£791.31	£0.00
				£0.00
			£1,582.79	
			£38,538.26	

Appendix B



Robin Hood Solar Farm

Toppesfield Parish Council
Introductory Meeting

Qualitas
energy

Agenda

- Team Introductions and About Qualitas Energy
- Project overview
- Why has this site been chosen?
- Environmental Considerations
- Construction Access Route
- Key Benefits
- Community Benefit Fund
- Next steps
- Feedback details
- Q&A

Qualitas
energy

Qualitas Energy

- [Qualitas Energy](#)'s business in the United Kingdom specialises in the acquisition, financing, project development, construction, and operation of renewable energy projects, with a mission to drive the transition towards decarbonisation.
- A team of c. 30 employees operating across three strategic locations in the United Kingdom: London, Bristol, and Edinburgh.
- Qualitas Energy owns Acorn Bioenergy. Acorn Bioenergy has achieved planning consent for five biomethane plants in the last few years, two of which are built and others which are progressing towards construction. One [Acorn project](#) at Haverhill called Spring Grove, was refused in June 2025.
- We are committed to building a relationship with the community near the Robin Hood site.



Project overview

Qualitas Energy is developing proposals for Robin Hood Solar Farm, a c.60MW (AC) fixed panel solar farm on a site near Robin Hood End, northwest of Braintree in Essex.

- A solar farm producing up to c.60MW (AC) of renewable electricity (enough to power the equivalent of 16,200 homes)
- Onsite grid connection into an existing pylon
- Landscape and environmental enhancements
- A package of other community benefits through a designated Community Benefit Fund

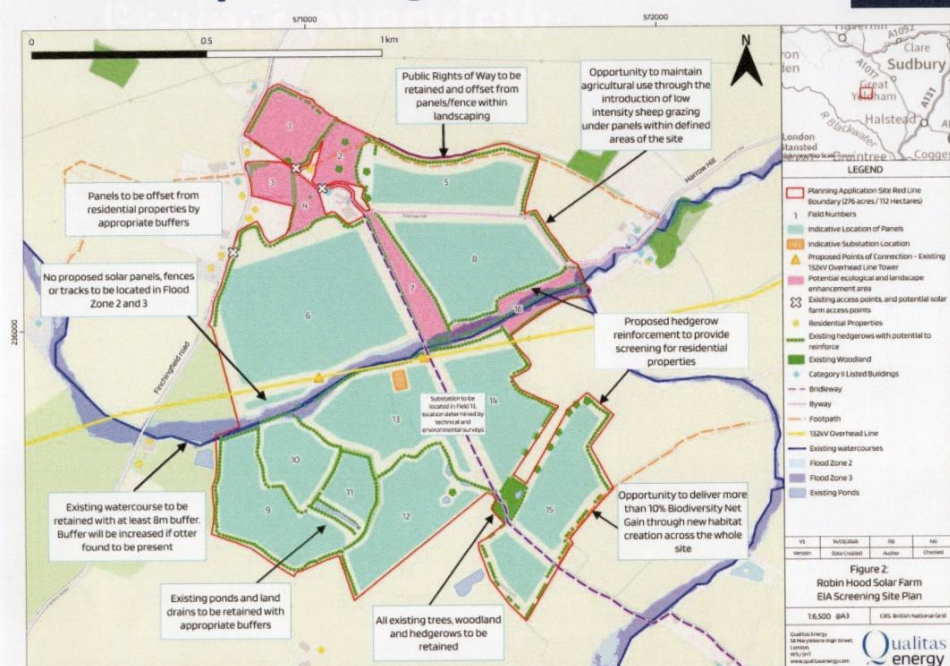
The point of connection to the national electricity network will be on-site, connecting to an existing 132kV overhead line which already passes across the land.



Planning Preparation Process



Concept Design



Initial Activity Phase

Why has this site been chosen?



Three key considerations.

Connection:

- The site benefits from an overhead line with spare capacity – making best use of existing infrastructure and helping to reduce consumers electricity costs.

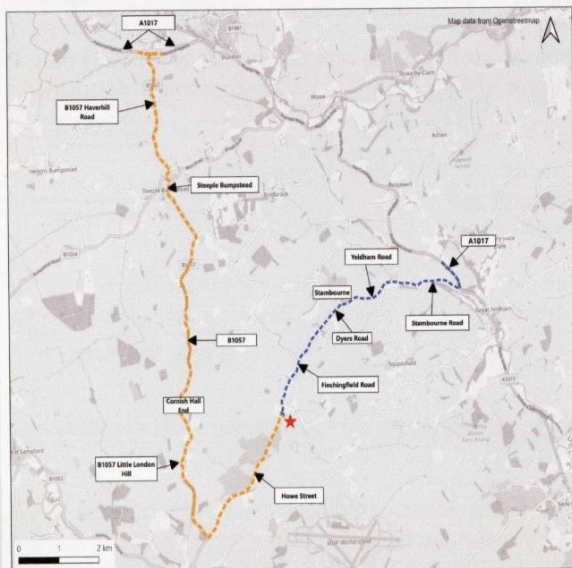
Available Land:

- Sufficient land to deliver the 60MWac grid offer

Environmental Considerations/Policy:

- Site does not contain protected designations
- Not Green Belt
- Well screened with mature vegetation – retain and enhance/extend
- Majority of land outside flood risk areas – no development in flood risk areas
- Sufficiently distant from residential receptors
- Safe access points into the site
- Retain/protect public rights of way – opportunities for new permissive routes
- Limited archaeology- opportunity for interpretation
- Lowest value of best and most versatile land – retain agricultural use through low intensity sheep grazing

Construction Access Route



- Proposing to route the construction traffic on a one-way arrival and departure system whereby arrivals would be from the north-east from the A1017 via Stambourne with departures to the west to the A1017 at Haverhill via Howe Street, Cornish Hall End and Steeple Bumpstead.
- During construction, the development will, on average require 10 HGV deliveries a day. At peak times this may increase to 15 deliveries per day. Typically however there will be much fewer HGVs per day, for long periods.
- During the operational period of Robin Hood Solar Farm, approximately 3-4 light goods vehicles are expected per month.
- To minimise disruption, as part of our planning application we will prepare and submit an outline Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) to manage environmental impacts and control construction traffic.

Key Benefits



Energy security and lower bills – Transitioning to solar generation (and other renewable sources) gives much greater certainty for the long-term future of energy supply to the UK, and helps reduce energy prices in our day to day lives.

Meeting growing electricity need – The solar farm would generate enough clean, renewable energy to power the equivalent of 16,200 homes.

Supporting the local economy – We are committed to employing local suppliers and contractors throughout construction and long-term operation, ensuring that investment stays within the community and directly benefits local businesses.

Tackling climate change – The Robin Hood Solar Farm project will contribute towards the UK's transition to a low carbon economy and will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with local, national, and international targets, including the legally binding commitment to reach Net Zero by 2050.

Delivering wildlife benefits – there will be a biodiversity net gain with the land being managed for nature for 40 years

Community Benefit Fund

- Qualitas Energy is committed to being a force for good for all our neighbours and host communities. We are keen to ensure that local residents and other stakeholders have an opportunity to help shape the proposals.
- We seek to build relationships locally around the site to understand how best we can also deliver benefits to nearby communities, as well as supporting the green energy transition.
- We intend to establish a community benefit fund worth approximately £500 per installed megawatt of capacity per year, index linked. At 60 MW capacity, the fund would provide £30,000 per year. With an operational life of 40 years, the community benefit fund from the Robin Hood Solar Farm would total approximately £1.2 million over the project lifetime.
- Seeks to provide financial support for activities and projects within the local area following the construction and energisation of the project.
- This sits outside the planning process and does not influence the planning outcome.



Next steps

- EIA Scoping process – submission of scoping request to the local planning authority
- Public event to explain design to date
- Opportunity to provide feedback

detailed dates and locations for the in person meeting are to be confirmed

Feedback

We are seeking feedback on our proposals for the Robin Hood Solar Farm. Please submit feedback or get in touch with any questions by using any of the methods below:

- **Email:** consultation@thirty47.co.uk
- **Feedback form:** available on the project website: www.robinhood-solar.co.uk
- **Freepost:** FREEPOST TC CONSULTATION (no further address or stamp required)
- **Freephone:** you can call the project freephone voicemail line on **0800 699 0081** and leave a message (a member of the project team will call you back between Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm excluding public holidays)



Q&A

Qualitas
energy