

How to build trust and reduce division around major UK renewables projects?

**An approach to deepening
stakeholder dialogue based on
insights from the field**

Table of contents

Summary	3
1. Context: Deep divisions are emerging around major UK renewables projects	7
2. Understanding stakeholder issues around the proposed Leoda Solar Farm, North Kesteven: findings from our research ‘pilot project’	13
3. An alternative approach: rebuilding trust through independently facilitated dialogue	27
4. Concluding comments	43
Glossary of key terms	45

Summary

The UK faces a critical paradox: 80% of the public supports renewable energy nationally¹, yet local acceptance is becoming more elusive. Local authority refusal rates for solar projects are increasing (rising to 25% in 2024)² while opposition campaigns around large-scale renewables projects – whether governed by the Planning Act 2008 (in England and Wales) or by Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (in Scotland) – are growing increasingly organised and politically weaponised.³

Resource Resolutions is a new organisation aiming to reduce conflict and division around energy and natural resources. We are an impartial mediating group, helping to build understanding on all sides, bridge divides and – where possible – improve outcomes from energy and natural resource development (see box below for more on RR). Our team and advisors bring extensive global experience in understanding and designing ways to resolve energy and natural resource disputes, and we are now also focusing on renewable energy in the UK.

This paper explores whether independently facilitated dialogue can bridge emerging divisions around renewable energy development in the UK. To investigate this question, we undertook a brief research ‘pilot project’ in Lincolnshire, a part of the country that has seen both a significant increase in renewable energy deployment in recent years and growing community concern and resistance. We selected a project at a relatively early stage of its development – the Leoda Solar Farm in North Kesteven district, a ‘Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project’ (NSIP) in pre-

¹ [DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker: Headline findings, Summer 2025, UK](#)

² [UK solar applications spike ahead of CP30 but planning process remains slow - Solar Power Portal](#)

³ [Suffolk residents protest 'relentless infrastructure pressures' | Lincolnshire council leader vows to 'lie in front of bulldozers' | Miliband planning shake-up to bypass local opposition in wind farm push](#)

application phase – and after identifying the broad set of stakeholders likely affected by and interested in the project, we conducted face-to-face and virtual interviews with around 20 project stakeholders in November 2025.

Interviewees included representatives of the Leoda developer as well residents and representatives of parish councils, action groups, local farmers, a community association and local authorities for the three most affected villages: Brant Broughton, Leadenham, and Welbourn.

Using open interviews based on active listening, we sought to understand a broad spectrum of perspectives – from vocal opponents to quieter voices often absent from formal consultation processes. This exploratory research aimed to assess whether a dialogue-based approach could build trust in a UK renewables context and to identify opportunities for more constructive engagement.

Key points

This paper draws on research around the proposed Leoda Solar Farm to examine broader patterns of engagement and division affecting UK renewable energy development. While the Leoda case study provides the empirical basis for this analysis, the insights and lessons outlined below are intended to apply across renewable energy projects in the UK context.

- 1. The UK's energy transition is facing a local legitimacy crisis.** While renewable energy enjoys strong national support, the planning system is losing public trust at precisely the moment when large-scale infrastructure deployment is accelerating. This disconnect challenges not only individual projects but also the broader political consensus on net zero.

2. Stakeholder dynamics around the Leoda Solar Project

reflect this broader trend of deepening division. In line with the national data, our interviews in North Kesteven suggested that most community stakeholders around Leoda are not ideologically opposed to solar energy – many acknowledged the importance of decarbonisation and the role solar energy can play in that. However, almost all the stakeholders we spoke to expressed opposition to the Leoda project and other nearby renewable energy developments, some with resignation or pragmatism, others with a commitment to active opposition and mobilisation.

3. Surface disagreements are often driven by much deeper concerns.

Our interviews suggest that opposition stems from four primary factors: a perceived lack of influence over decision making affecting people's lives; concern over the role of profit-seeking companies in the development of public infrastructure; concerns about the cumulative regional impact of solar development on landscape, heritage and local culture; and the view that community consultation around projects is fundamentally performative.

4. Standard consultation is necessary but

insufficient. Developers sometimes exceed statutory consultation requirements, yet communities still report feeling powerless and unheard. The problem is not necessarily the quantity of engagement but the quality of conversations that standard consultation allows – consultation extracts opinions on predetermined proposals rather than creating space for genuine dialogue about whether and how projects can work for communities.

5. Independently facilitated dialogue offers a third

way. Between blanket opposition, resigned pragmatism and passive acceptance lies a more productive path: structured conversation convened by a trusted facilitator with no stake in the outcome. Based on our experience, this approach can establish common facts, surface underlying interests rather than entrenched positions, and identify opportunities for mutual gain that adversarial processes obscure.

6. Independently facilitated dialogue balances community, developer and national needs.

For communities, independently facilitated dialogue restores a sense of fairness and can create more influence over project design and benefit distribution. For developers, it reduces planning risk, protects reputation and can improve project outcomes without delaying projects. For the UK, it offers a pathway to deliver essential infrastructure while maintaining democratic legitimacy.

7. Evidence suggests this works.

Our Lincolnshire research reveals significant divisions – but also untapped potential for collaboration if stakeholders can engage differently. International experience, including from Europe, demonstrates that independently facilitated dialogue can reduce opposition, make planning less problematic, and produce better outcomes for all parties.

8. There is a real need to restore trust in renewable energy

planning. Without restoring trust in decision-making, those promoting the energy transition will encounter increasing challenges and consensus around the UK's energy future will remain elusive.

About Resource Resolutions

Resource Resolutions (RR) is an independent venture established to address division and build alignment around energy and natural resource development. We are not lobbyists or PR consultants, but impartial mediators dedicated to bridging divides and, where possible, identifying mutually beneficial resolutions.

Drawing on our team's global experience across scores of complex energy and natural resource disputes, we design innovative dialogue processes rooted in stakeholders' genuine needs and interests. Our mandate is to apply these proven international conflict resolution techniques to the UK context, helping developers and communities navigate deepening divisions to achieve better, more sustainable outcomes.

RR is committed to impartiality in all aspects of our work. This is primarily ensured by the composition of our Global Advisory Council – which oversees our work and acts as RR's governance body. As well as leading industry figures, the Global Advisory Council includes leading figures from civil society, NGOs and international organisations including the founding director of the World Bank's independent community complaints organisation and the CEO of a First Nations NGO in Canada, which focuses on protecting indigenous rights and opportunities around major infrastructure projects.

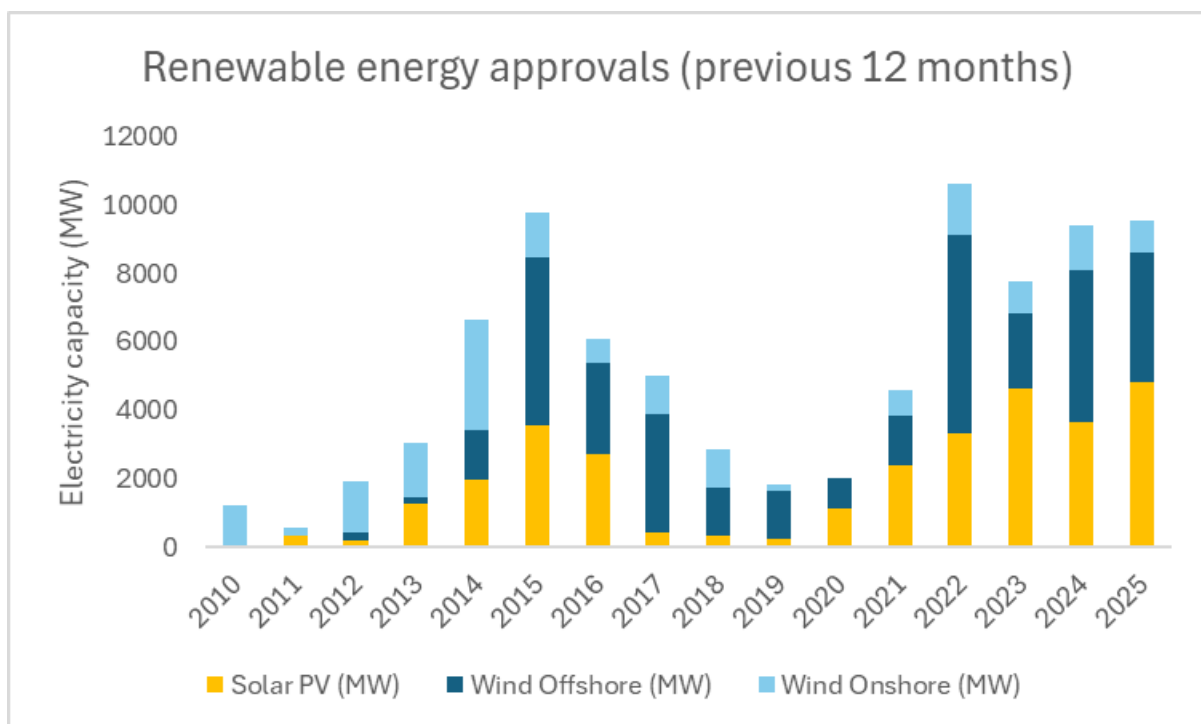
For more about RR, please see here: [Resource Resolutions](#)

For more about our team, Advisory Council and advisor network see here: [Who we are](#)

For more on our work in the UK, please see here: [Our work in the UK](#)

1. Context: Deep divisions are emerging around major UK renewables projects

Over the past five years (2020–2025), the UK’s renewable energy landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. The period began with aggressive targets set by the Conservative government to make the UK the “Saudi Arabia of wind”.⁴ In 2024, the new Labour government further stepped up the UK’s drive to net zero and by late 2025, renewables had definitively overtaken fossil fuels in the electricity mix. Renewable installed capacity has increased by ~30% since 2020, with the nation now accelerating towards a “Clean Power 2030” target.



Source: [UK Renewable Energy Approvals: Q2 2025](#)

However, such ambitious national targets have been accompanied by a growing local challenge to the siting of renewable energy projects in many areas, especially areas like the

⁴ [Wind turbines: How UK wants to become 'Saudi Arabia of wind' - BBC News](#)

Highlands of Scotland⁵ and the ‘solar corridor’ of the East Midlands⁶ and East Anglia⁷, which have seen a relatively high concentration of recent and planned energy infrastructure development.⁸

National-level support for the energy transition remains generally high – 80% of those polled by the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) in 2025 favoured the use of renewable energy.⁹ But, with increasing frequency, this does not translate into consistent local support for projects on the ground. Over recent years there has been a 16% swing in respondents’ net sentiment away from the mere *idea* of solar projects in their local area; a near-identical swing was recorded for wind projects.

Source: [DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker: Summer 2025, UK](#)

	How happy or unhappy would you be about plans for a solar farm in your local area?		
Period	Overall happy	Wouldn't mind either way	Overall unhappy
Spring 2022	54%	27%	9%
Spring 2025	47%	29%	14%
Summer 2025	43%	32%	14%
% change	-11%	+5%	+5%
% swing net sentiment	-16%		

⁵ [Highlanders rise up against the march of massive wind turbines and power pylons, saying 'we've had enough' - Scottish Daily Express](#)

⁶ [Council leader 'disappointed' as North Lincolnshire Green Energy Park gets go-ahead - Grimsby Live](#)

⁷ [Suffolk solar farm gets the go-ahead despite opposition - BBC News](#)

⁸ [Renewable Energy Planning Database: quarterly extract - GOV.UK](#) | [TEC Register](#) | [National Energy System Operator](#)

⁹ [DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker: Headline findings, Summer 2025, UK](#)

In addition to shifting attitudes at national level, many developers are now contending with significant and mobilised opposition to projects on the ground.

Recent UK news headlines



The dynamics of such emerging resistance vary with local context. However, recurring themes are emerging, including concerns about the industrialisation of the countryside as renewables projects get bigger and more clustered; the perceived removal of agricultural land from production, undermining food security and rural livelihoods; and public health and safety concerns relating to the deployment of renewable energy technologies.

Planning policy makers and many developers argue that the planning system was explicitly designed to find a balance between national infrastructure priorities and local public concerns. The Planning Act 2008, for example, which governs 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects' (NSIPs) in England and Wales is a heavily regulated process that ensures projects meet technical, environmental, health and safety standards while allowing for efficient delivery of infrastructure. The Act also seeks to address local concerns by providing opportunities for public

participation by affected communities, local authorities and other statutory consultees through multiple rounds of consultation and public comment.¹⁰

However, NSIPs overwhelmingly receive DCO approval once applications are submitted¹¹ and decision-making power ultimately lies in the hands of the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.¹² (Under the Scottish system, while objections from local authorities can trigger public inquiries, final decision-making power rests with Scottish ministers, not local authorities). This has given rise to the view in many affected communities – including but not limited to those actively opposed to local projects – that public consultation during the planning process is a fundamentally performative exercise.¹³ Many local stakeholders report feeling powerless and excluded in the planning process, despite many developers meeting – and in some cases exceeding – the statutory requirements.

A significant number of developers do seek to engage with stakeholders conscientiously and thoroughly; even so, trust in the planning process is eroding and it is increasingly seen as mechanism for imposing national policy on local people. The removal of statutory consultation requirements from the Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025 – now awaiting royal assent – is only likely to exacerbate this viewpoint.¹⁴

¹⁰[Schedule of statutory consultees, Infrastructure Planning \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Regulations 2024](#)

¹¹ [Renewable Energy Planning Database: quarterly extract - GOV.UK](#)

¹² The planning systems in Scotland and Wales are distinct but share some characteristics with the NSIP regime. In Wales, projects over 10MW are approved by Welsh ministers; projects over 350MW are approved by DESNZ and fall under the NSIP process. In Scotland, the NSIP process does not apply but projects over 50MW are approved by Scottish ministers under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989.

¹³ [What shapes community acceptance of large-scale solar farms? A case study of the UK's first 'nationally significant' solar farm - ScienceDirect](#)

¹⁴ [East Suffolk County Council - Agenda Item 10 - Amendment to Motion 1 | Planning Bill breaks Labour's nature promises, say The Wildlife Trusts and RSPB | The Wildlife Trusts](#)

Declining trust in the planning system mirrors – and reinforces – falling trust in UK institutions more broadly. Both are being instrumentalised by ‘anti-establishment’ political movements who have adopted anti-net zero policies as a way to harness local concern around renewables projects.¹⁵ The danger here is that, without addressing trust in the planning process and restoring a sense of public participation in renewable energy development, the national politics of renewable energy could turn.¹⁶

In this context, Resource Resolutions has been exploring whether an alternative approach to engagement – based on independently-facilitated dialogue – might help to bridge emerging divides at project and regional level.¹⁷ This exploration has involved research and interviews around a major solar project currently in pre-application phase that would be developed in North Kesteven district, Lincolnshire, a part of the country that is seeing considerable renewable energy development.

¹⁵ [Parties clash as UK energy policy turns into political battleground | Article Page](#)

¹⁶ [Trust and confidence in Britain's system of government at record low | National Centre for Social Research](#)

¹⁷ The potential for renewed dialogue at national policy-level to improve the legitimacy of national renewable energy planning would be a worthwhile field for research but goes beyond the scope of RR's current pilot project, which focuses on project-level and regional dynamics.

2. Understanding stakeholder issues around the proposed Leoda Solar Farm, North Kesteven: findings from our research ‘pilot project’

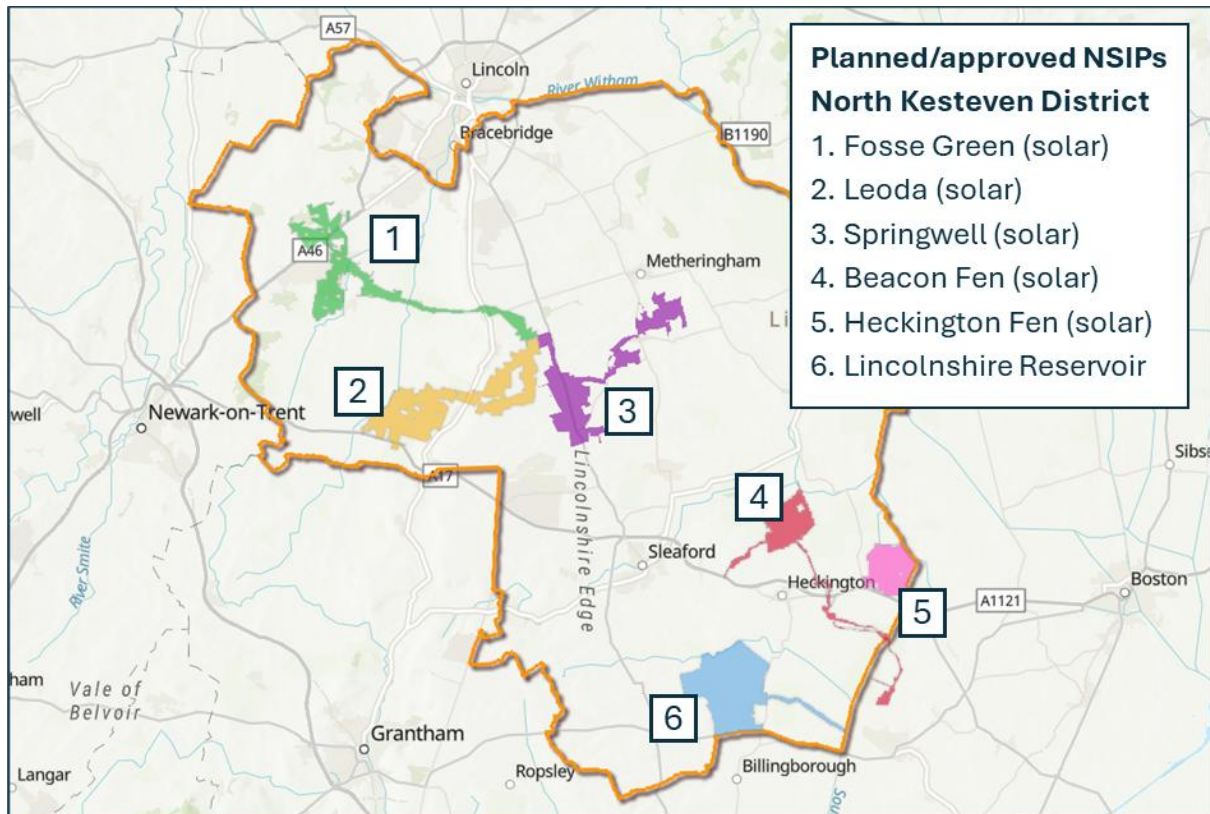
Lincolnshire: a microcosm of national dynamics

Lincolnshire has become a hub for renewable energy. In the last decade, the county has emerged as a primary location for large solar projects in the UK. There are approximately 14 Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) either approved, in construction, or in late-stage planning in Lincolnshire as of late 2025. Solar accounts for the vast majority of the new and planned capacity. As of late 2025, up to 5000 hectares of land have been allocated for five approved solar farms, with proposals for another 5000 hectares in the pipeline.

Lincolnshire’s flat terrain and potential for strong grid connections make it a preferred location for solar projects. North Kesteven, a local government district within Lincolnshire, has seen a number of large solar projects proposed within a concentrated area. This is largely a result of a proposed electricity transmission substation at Navenby offering 4.2GW of new connection capacity. However, the district is also primarily an agricultural region and holds strong historic and cultural ties to farming. A central perception among many local communities in Lincolnshire is that the planning framework inadequately accounts for the combined and compounding effects of multiple projects concentrated within the same region.¹⁸ This concern is not unique to Lincolnshire; cumulative impact from renewable energy development has emerged as a significant issue in other

¹⁸ NSIP developers are required to conduct Cumulative Effect Assessments under the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. However, guidance is high level, there are limited opportunities for community input and the CEAs are conducted on a project-by-project basis.

UK renewable hotspots, including the Scottish Highlands, Wales and rural English counties. In Lincolnshire specifically, there is apprehension that the cumulative effect of these projects will substantially alter the county's landscape character, erode its agricultural heritage, and impose a disproportionate share of national renewable energy infrastructure on a single region.



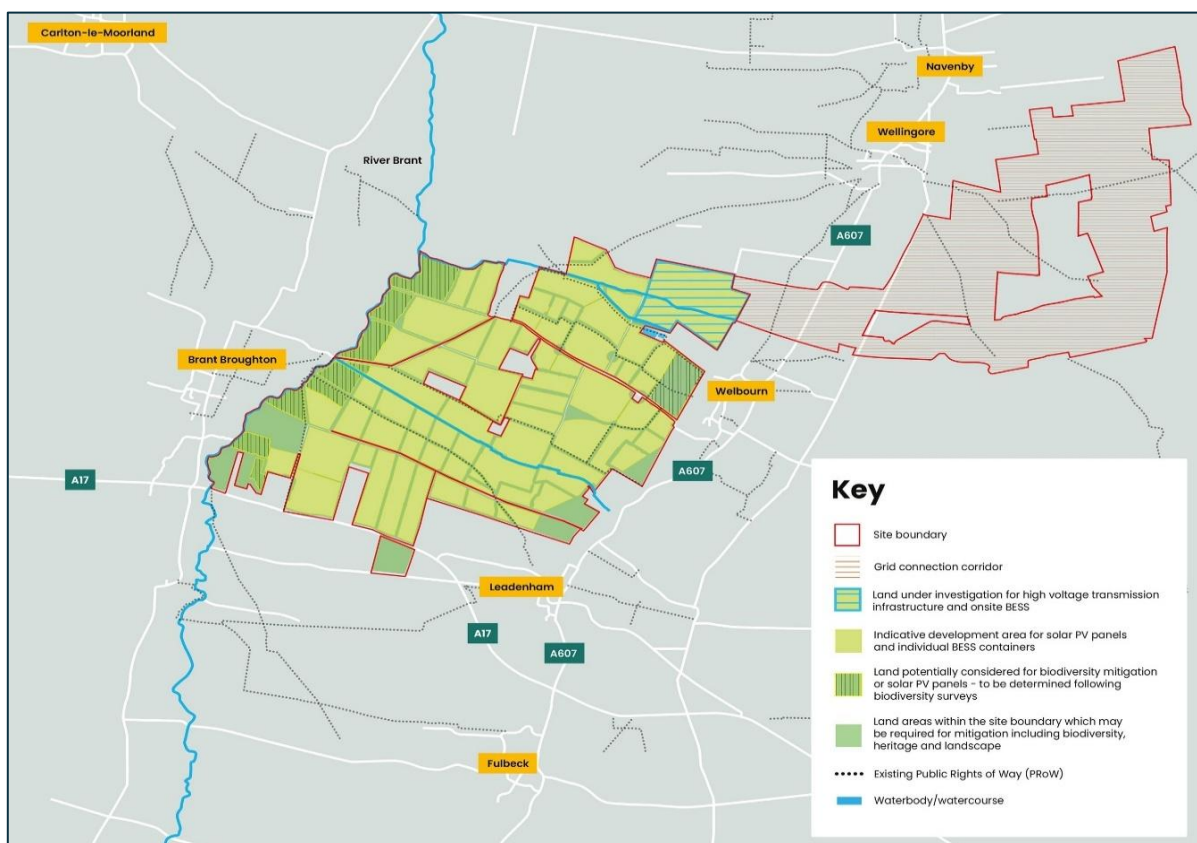
Map source: [North Kesteven District Council](#)

These concerns have fed into county-level politics with Reform UK gaining control in May 2025 of Lincolnshire County Council and the Greater Lincolnshire mayoral position on an explicitly anti-solar platform. While North Kesteven District Council (NKDC) has approached these issues with pragmatism, both Conservative and Reform councillors have voiced concerns about the loss of productive farmland and advocated for prioritising rooftop and brownfield sites over agricultural land.

At local level, individual landowners, in many cases, benefit substantially from leasing arrangements for solar projects, with lease income often exceeding agricultural returns by multiple factors. However, many residents have expressed concern regarding the long-term consequences for domestic food production capacity, employment within rural communities, and the preservation of the region's agricultural character and identity.

Leoda Solar Farm

The Leoda Solar Farm is a major renewable energy proposal that is planned to be situated across 2,400 acres between the villages of Brant Broughton, Leadenham, and Welbourn.¹⁹



Source: [Leoda Solar Farm](#)

¹⁹ Leadenham and Welbourn are two of the 'Cliff Villages', which are positioned along the north-to-south Lincoln Cliff escarpment. The other cliff villages are Navenby, Wellingore, Fulbeck, Caythorpe, Waddington, Harmston, Coleby, Boothby Graffoe. Despite being located only 2 miles to the west of Leadenham, Brant Broughton sits below the escarpment and is not an official 'Cliff Village' but is closely associated with the village cluster.

Developed by Telis Energy UK, the Leoda project is designed to generate between 500 and 600MW of electricity, supported by an integrated Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).²⁰

Because its planned capacity exceeds 50MW, Leoda is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), meaning the final decision rests with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero rather than local councils. The developer completed non-statutory consultation in March 2025 and is preparing to enter the Statutory Consultation phase. If approved, construction could commence in 2028, with operations anticipated by 2030 at the earliest.

RR Research Process

Following introductory telephone calls with selected stakeholders, an RR team visited North Kesteven between the 20 and 22 November 2025 to conduct face-to-face meetings with stakeholders around the Leoda project. The purpose of these meetings was to build a deeper understanding of the interests and positions of key stakeholders, and to interview other residents often referred to as the “silent majority”.

RR initially contacted the developer, district and parish councils, and action groups in North Kesteven, as the stakeholders most directly connected to the Leoda project. RR then contacted several businesses, clubs, and community groups based in the villages of Brant Broughton, Leadenham, and Welbourn. These respondents were selected to build a deeper understanding of the broad spectrum of positions, including less vocal stakeholders in

²⁰ [Leoda Solar Farm – Leoda Solar Farm is a proposed new solar project on land situated northwest of Leadenham in Lincolnshire.](#)

the area. In total RR spoke with around 20 local stakeholders while visiting the area.

It is important to note that the goal of our research was not to single out or critique the Leoda project, but rather to draw insights from a real-life case study that might be broadly applicable to UK renewable energy projects. Leoda was selected as this case study because of its relatively early stage of development and its location in a county that has already been a significant focus for energy infrastructure development. Many of the stakeholder responses identified below – while framed in local terms – would likely also be found around other projects.

Developer perspectives: confident in the benefits and current progress of the project

The developer of the Leoda Solar Farm is Telis Energy UK, a subsidiary of Telis Energy Group, a European renewable energy platform wholly owned by US-based private equity firm The Carlyle Group. Telis Energy UK describes itself as “a green energy company that is transforming the UK energy landscape with innovative hybrid energy hubs”. Announced in January 2025, Leoda is the first Telis project in the UK, with Telis Energy also developing a portfolio of green energy projects in Germany, France and Italy.

Telis is positive about the potential outcomes of the Leoda project as well as its current progress. It believes there are numerous benefits that Leoda can create for the surrounding communities and the rest of the UK, with the principal benefit being the production of renewable energy and the decarbonisation of the UK’s energy supply.

Telis also believes the project can provide tangible benefits through community benefit funds and “improving biodiversity locally through creating new habitats for wildlife and letting plant life grow around the panels”.²¹

The developer is clear that the project site has been selected for primarily geographic and technical factors. According to Telis Energy UK’s CEO, William Duncan:

“The site in Leadenham, south of Lincoln, has good irrigation, a good grid connection, and is flat land. The majority is not best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land (subject to testing). Also, the area sits outside all major environmental designations (National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, etc), has low population density, and very good natural screening with hedgerows and topography.”²²

Telis has stated that it is “committed to working closely with stakeholders and residents over the coming months to develop a project that benefits both the region and the country as a whole.”²³ According to the developer, feedback received during non-statutory consultation “hasn't been too negative” and “most people are asking questions and haven't made up their minds, although you always expect a few objectors”.²⁴

The developer says that there has been very good attendance at its non-statutory consultation events and believes that while many attendees were disappointed to see another project proposed in their area, they found it useful to know that they

²¹ [Leoda Solar Farm – Leoda Solar Farm is a proposed new solar project on land situated northwest of Leadenham in Lincolnshire.](#)

²² [Telis Announces Nationally Significant Project in UK | Energy Focus](#)

²³ [Concerns raised over Leoda Solar Farm in North Kesteven - BBC News](#)

²⁴ [Meeting held at Leadenham Village Hall by Telis Energy UK - LincsOnline](#)

could object to the project in principle, while also engaging in a positive manner around benefits agreements and the practicalities of the development.

Ahead of a future statutory consultation, Telis is intending to set up a Community Liaison Group (CLG) to “provide a structured forum for local representatives, community groups and technical stakeholders to engage directly with the project team, receive updates and raise questions or feedback as the project progresses.” Telis hopes this will be a way for it to proactively address stakeholder concerns and to build stronger relationships with local communities.

Stakeholder perspectives: significant frustration and anger around the project

It is important to note that in reporting the stakeholder perspectives below, RR is not evaluating or necessarily supporting their validity; we are simply setting them out to illuminate the case study. The developer may provide its response to these concerns in upcoming consultation sessions and future communication materials.

Although a wide range of issues and concerns were raised by our interviewees, almost all those we spoke to expressed opposition to the project – some with resignation or pragmatism, others with a commitment to active opposition.

Some respondents from affected communities and authorities held what they described as “a pragmatic position”, believing the project will be approved despite widespread local opposition. In these cases, the respondents expressed that they were open to engaging with the developer in the hope that the project served

the communities' and their own interests and its potentially negative impacts were effectively managed.

However, commitment to active opposition was more common among the people we interviewed, including among residents of the three villages and their parish councils. Organised opposition to the project is coordinated by the Cliff Villages Solar Action Group, which is undertaking a variety of campaigning activities, including community meetings, petitioning the local MP, collecting letters of opposition, and online activism.²⁵ This group was formed to address the wider set of renewable energy projects affecting the Cliff Villages²⁶, but is associated with a newer Leoda-focused group Leoda Solar Action.²⁷

Most notably, the majority of our interviews revealed a depth of feeling that transcends typical planning objections. Anger, frustration, and a profound sense of powerlessness ran through many of the conversations, reflecting an emotionally charged position rooted in identity, heritage, and perceived injustice – feelings that standard consultation processes often fail to acknowledge, much less address.

Summary of prominent issues raised by local stakeholders

The primary concern among community members opposed to the project centred on the scale of Leoda, which many felt was “completely out of proportion” for Lincolnshire’s rural and agricultural landscape. There was a strong belief amongst many that rural Lincolnshire communities have been asked to bear an “unfair burden” of national energy infrastructure to primarily benefit urban populations elsewhere. Importantly, local

²⁵ [Cliff Villages Solar Action Group](#)

²⁶ Springwell Solar Farm, Fosse Green Solar Farm and the Navenby substation in particular.

²⁷ [Leoda Solar Action](#)

stakeholders with this view did not evaluate Leoda project on its individual merits alone but viewed the project as part of a wider proliferation of energy infrastructure in North Kesteven.

One of the most common beliefs driving negative sentiment towards to the Leoda project was that agricultural land should not be sacrificed for a solar project. While farmers we spoke to acknowledged that the land was not the highest quality (Grade 1) agricultural land, many residents questioned why solar projects were being sited on farms rather than what they deemed to be ‘less productive land’. The majority felt these decisions were being driven by economic gain, but others felt there was also “short-sighted ... political agenda” against rural communities.

Opinions varied around the potential benefits Leoda could bring to the local community. Some saw that community benefits funds stemming from the project could improve local infrastructure and help support community groups in the area. One interviewee, for example, noted that they would be firmly supportive of the project were it to contribute to the building of facilities essential to the survival of a local sports club.

However, the majority of people we spoke to appeared to believe that no level of community benefit or mitigation could adequately offset changes to the landscape they believe would be caused by Leoda; for some local residents, there were no pressing socio-economic needs that the community benefits fund could address.

Many respondents felt that the mitigation measures proposed by the developer were inadequate to address the significant changes anticipated to the area around the site. Initiatives such as additional hedgerows, increased tree planting, and biodiversity net gain areas were welcomed in principle. However, a large

number of respondents were sceptical of their overall effectiveness in reducing the visual impact of Leoda, particularly from the perspective of the affected Cliff Villages (Leadenham and Welbourn) which are located on the 50-metre-high escarpment along the eastern flank of the proposed project area.

Google Earth image of the project and adjacent villages



Source: [Leoda Solar Action](#)

Some respondents expressed concern for the safety of PV arrays and associated infrastructure. The core concern among local communities was the perceived increased risk of fire, flooding, and pollution from Battery Energy Storage Systems and the solar farm itself. While the developer has assured communities that the project will not increase the risk of flooding in the area, many residents do not trust this assessment. Many of the concerns about fire and health risk were informed by a letter sent to North Kesteven District Council by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), which expressed concern about the current design of the proposed BESS at Navenby.²⁸

²⁸ [Facebook page of Dr Caroline Johnson MP](#)

Concerns were also raised about decommissioning of the site at the end of its lifespan. Some respondents were sceptical that the land could be effectively restored to agricultural use and were concerned about what they perceived to be a lack of guarantees around the owner's responsibility to carry out the decommissioning process in the future. Some also saw the UK's lack of capacity for solar panel recycling to be a concern.

Among both strong opponents of the project and relative pragmatists, there was a widespread frustration with how the developer had engaged with them and communicated in certain instances. Some said that they had not received satisfactory answers to their questions at public meetings. Developer comments characterising opposition as “inevitable” and referencing the area's “low population density” were also perceived by many as “dismissive” of local concerns. Some felt engagement had been “too corporate” and “polished” and were sceptical of the purpose of Telis' proposed CLG. As above, it is not for RR to evaluate or validate these statements; simply to highlight the apparent divergence between stakeholder and developer perceptions.

Underlying beliefs and interests driving division

A recurrent feeling among many stakeholders was one of “powerlessness”, with a strong perception that the planning system inherently prioritises developer interests over those of the community. This belief drove much of the anger directed towards the Leoda project as communities felt as though consultation and engagement were fundamentally performative exercises. This feeling of powerlessness, felt by many opposed to the project, reflected a wider mistrust in the UK planning process and a growing frustration around what they saw as the prioritisation of

net zero targets over the immediate interests of rural communities in North Kesteven.

Beyond powerlessness, a strong sense of identity and heritage emerged as a driver of opposition. For many respondents, North Kesteven's agricultural character is not just a land use designation but the foundation of community identity – shaped by generations of farming families who see themselves as stewards rather than simply owners of the landscape. For some, this intergenerational connection transforms the prospect of solar development from a land management decision into a perceived attack on cultural continuity.

When respondents described themselves as “guardians” of place threatened by “foreign capitalists”, they were articulating something in addition to economic anxiety: a fear that the physical and symbolic landscape will be irretrievably altered. In a similar fashion, concerns for the loss of food production were explained through references to increased national vulnerability, whether because of “the war coming with Russia” or because of the potential for China to remotely “switch off” solar panels fabricated there.

Along with the view – held widely by our respondents – that renewable energy deployment reflects a “political agenda against rural people”, these can be seen as narratives that make sense of changes that feel both unwelcome and imposed. For these stakeholders, opposition to solar projects in Lincolnshire can be interpreted as a form of cultural self-defence, protecting not just a view but a viable, continuous rural identity they see as essential to both local and national wellbeing.

RR's evaluation: can the planned consultation process bridge local divides?

During the future statutory consultation, the developer plans to hold number of consultation events locally, where all stakeholders in the affected area²⁹ will be invited to attend.

As part of this, Telis plans to hold guided walks around the site to show attendees its plans and answer specific questions. Additionally, Telis hopes that the Community Liaison Group will provide an ongoing channel through which concerns and questions can be heard by the developer.

Beyond local community stakeholders, Telis will seek feedback on the project from all local authorities and statutory consultees such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency. The findings and results of this process will then be fed into the application before being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration.

Telis's prior and planned engagement activities appear to meet the statutory requirements and Telis asserts that activities during Statutory Consultation will exceed the minimum requirements in many respects. Nevertheless, RR's interviews with local stakeholders found that there are some fundamental divergences between the positions of many local stakeholders and the developer.

As described above, these positions are often supported by deeply held beliefs and worldviews that may go unacknowledged

²⁹ While the Planning Act 2008 requires developers to consult people living in the 'vicinity' of the affected land, it does not prescribe a specific distance. The Primary Consultation Zone (PCZ) is therefore defined by the developer, typically in agreement with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) as part of the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). We understand Telis has defined the PCZ to incorporate stakeholders within a 3km perimeter of the project.

in formal consultation settings. Additionally, a deep-rooted mistrust in the formal planning process and a perceived power imbalance between developer and communities, means that any attempts to bridge divides through traditional consultation will likely be challenging.

In short, based on our experiences with other major energy and resource projects, including internationally, RR expects that at this stage of the project's development, local concerns around the scale of the project, its visual impact, and its effects on existing local economic activity, heritage, and culture will persist as polarising issues.

3. An alternative approach: rebuilding trust through independently facilitated dialogue

The disconnect between developer confidence in current engagement approaches and community perceptions of powerlessness and dismissiveness suggest to us that a different approach one that moves beyond extracting opinions on predetermined proposals to create genuine space for dialogue about whether and how projects might work for communities. This section outlines what such an approach could look like and why it matters not only for the Leoda project but for renewable energy planning across the UK.

What is independently facilitated dialogue?

Independently facilitated dialogue involves a respected and legitimate facilitator – acceptable to both the developer and the community – convening a round table meeting, or a series of such meetings, to explore together and at a deeper level the interests, needs and concerns of the different parties, rather than just their immediate demands or positions.

The facilitator ensures that everyone is heard (including quieter voices), guides the discussion to keep it constructive, and helps clarify misunderstandings. The goal is to help the developer and the community reach a better understanding of each other's perspectives and, if possible, find common ground or ways to resolve specific issues.

How it works in practice

Specifically, independently facilitated dialogue processes can help to:

1. **Establish a common fact base**, including by calling on independent experts to provide verifiable and accepted information about renewable energy, its environmental impacts and benefits, local conditions etc. For example, a facilitator can bring in an independent specialist to present verified data on flood risk, rather than relying on the developer's claims or community speculation that “the land will be ruined forever.”
2. **Allow more perspectives to be heard** by creating a ‘level-playing field’ among different stakeholder groups and establishing a set of ground rules for participation. Where discussion becomes heated, the facilitator can work with strong emotions and help the parties reframe and clarify their underlying perspectives and needs. For example, when a resident says you're “destroying our heritage”, the facilitator helps unpack whether the core concern is about land use, family legacy, economic viability, or identity, creating space for the developer to respond to the actual need rather than dismiss the emotional language as mere obstruction.
3. **Tackle deeper issues**. Rather than stopping at surface-level objections, independent facilitation helps uncover the legitimate underlying concerns – such as fears about community viability, cultural identity, environmental stewardship, or fairness in burden-sharing – that drive opposition. Once these deeper interests are understood, both developer and community can explore whether and how the project might be redesigned or managed to address them, or whether trade-offs can be negotiated that better reflect local values.

4. **Build trust through impartial mediation.** An independent facilitator – acceptable to all parties, with no stake in the project's outcome, and governed by clear protocols ensuring impartiality – stands outside the dispute. This independence and strong governance around it are crucial: the facilitator's role is to ensure fair process, not to persuade either side. Initial suspicion from both communities – who may fear co-optation – and developers – who may question the need for a neutral party – is normal. Ultimately, however, once communities trust that the facilitator has no hidden agenda, they are more likely to engage authentically. Similarly, developers can benefit from knowing that any agreement reached has been genuinely and fairly negotiated and therefore will carry greater legitimacy with regulators.
5. **Identify and agree areas where parties can work together to improve outcomes,** for example, around elements of project design, environmental impact management and benefit distribution. For example, communities concerned about farmland bird populations and developers might be able to find common ground on creating nesting habitats within the solar farm design, turning a potential flashpoint into shared conservation work.

How this is different from regular consultation

Under the Planning Act 2008 and related regulations and guidance, project developers are currently required by statute to consult with local authorities, landowners and people living in the vicinity of the land affected by a project, prior to the submission of an application for a Development Consent Order.³⁰

³⁰ [Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process - Consultation](#)

The statutory consultation landscape

Current best practice guidance from the Planning Inspectorate stipulates that this consultation should take a variety of forms – for example, local exhibitions, drop-in sessions, workshops and dissemination of lay summaries of key project information.

People attending these events are invited to ask questions and provide feedback on the project information provided by the developer. The Planning Act requires the developer to ‘have regard to any relevant responses’³¹ before making its application and the Planning Inspectorate will determine whether the developer has fulfilled its statutory obligations.

The gap between requirement and reality

Notwithstanding these requirements, in our conversations with project stakeholders in Lincolnshire and elsewhere, stakeholders frequently report that they have received insufficient information about planned projects and that their concerns have had little or no influence on the project’s design. This gives rise to a sense among many stakeholders that the consultation process is merely “lip service” or “a check-box exercise to persuade the Planning Inspectorate that [the developer] has fulfilled the requirements”.

A local authority planner we spoke to also indicated that set-piece consultation events can be intimidating to community stakeholders and that they can foster adversarial behaviours:

“the developers say – ‘here are our plans - what’s your feedback?’... But communities get annoyed at being presented with a *fait accompli*, they don’t trust that their voices are being listened to, and they want to feel like they

³¹ In UK legislation, “have regard to” imposes a statutory obligation to consider a particular factor, guidance, or consultation response when making a decision, without mandating that the decision-maker must *follow* it.

have some role in the creation of the project or at least that their concerns are properly heard.”

Dialogue as a distinct approach

Independently facilitated dialogue differs from standard consultation in a number of critical ways. Consultation operates primarily as a one-way or limited two-way process of communication. It is essentially about extracting stakeholder views on predetermined matters.

Dialogue, by contrast, is an active, ongoing two-way exchange. It involves genuine interactive discussion where all participants can contribute, question, and shape the agenda and the direction of conversation. Rather than simply collecting opinions on pre-set options, dialogue creates space for joint exploration of issues.

Independent facilitation of dialogue has particular advantages. Because the facilitator has no stake in the outcome and no decision-making authority over the parties, the facilitator is less affected by the prevailing mistrust and is better positioned to help the community and the developer move through their jointly agreed agenda.

Key differences at a glance

Aspect	Consultation	Dialogue
Direction of communication	Primarily one-way or limited two-way; developer presents proposals and gathers stakeholder feedback	Active, ongoing two-way exchange where all parties contribute and shape discussion
Who sets the agenda	Developer determines questions and parameters;	Participants jointly explore issues; the

Aspect	Consultation	Dialogue
	respondents have no part in framing questions	conversation itself shapes what is discussed
Timing	Time-limited; occurs at specific decision points	Ongoing and regular; can begin early and continues throughout the process
Decision-making power	Developer retains full control; must ‘have regard to’ input but can proceed regardless	Collaborative problem-solving; perspectives genuinely shape how issues are addressed
Handling of facts and information	Developer provides information; stakeholders provide feedback	Jointly establishes a common fact base; surfaces assumptions and resolves factual disagreements
Nature of engagement	Formal and structured around specific proposals	Flexible and adaptive; allows issues to emerge organically

How would this fit alongside existing consultation processes?

Dialogue processes and standard consultation approaches are not mutually exclusive – they can complement and enhance each other when thoughtfully integrated. The key is understanding that dialogue typically goes beyond the minimum legal requirements while still fulfilling them.

Many developers already engage in voluntary pre-statutory consultation with communities. However, this often takes a similar form to statutory consultation with its narrow pre-determined agenda and parameters, rather than broader

processes of dialogue focused on understanding different perspectives and joint problem solving.

Effective dialogue can help establish a shared understanding of facts and issues before formal consultation begins. This makes formal consultation more productive because participants already have a foundation of agreed information.

Government guidance on consultation already suggests that collaboration outside of individual project planning processes – between developers, statutory bodies, local planning authorities, and community stakeholders – can help identify and address challenges early and collectively by resolving conflicts, agreeing common evidence bases, and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Community Liaison Groups (CLGs): limitations and potential

Community Liaison Groups are increasingly common in UK renewable energy developments and represent the closest existing analogue to the dialogue processes we propose.

However, their effectiveness varies considerably, and many fall short of their potential.

Based on our conversations with stakeholders and published guidance, common limitations include:

1. *Developer-controlled agenda:* In many cases, CLGs are convened and chaired by the developer, which sets the agenda and determines what information is shared. This structural arrangement can undermine perceptions of legitimacy and reinforce the sense that engagement is performative.

2. *Reactive rather than deliberative*: Many CLGs function primarily as information-sharing forums rather than spaces for genuine two-way dialogue or joint problem-solving. Government guidance acknowledges that CLGs work best when they involve "open channels of communication", but in practice they often operate as one-way briefings.
3. *Limited participant diversity*: CLG membership is often restricted to formal community representatives who may not reflect the full range of community views, while quieter voices remain unheard.
4. *No independent facilitation*: Without an independent facilitator, CLG discussions can become adversarial or be dominated by the most vocal participants. The developer cannot credibly play the facilitating role while also being a party to the discussion.

This is not to say that CLGs cannot fulfil dialogue objectives – some do, particularly where developers have invested in independent facilitation and genuine co-design. But the critical variables are who convenes, who facilitates, and whether the community has genuine influence over the agenda and process.

Independently facilitated dialogue in the context of the Leoda project: what might this look like?

The Leoda project is now relatively advanced in its pre-application phase, which limits the potential transformative impacts of independently facilitated dialogue. For illustrative purposes, it may nonetheless be helpful to set out how it could apply even at this stage of a project's development.

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A series of 2–4 roundtable sessions, running alongside the statutory consultation period, could provide a structured forum for stakeholders to move beyond positional statements and explore underlying interests.

These sessions could be convened by an independent facilitator operating under a clear, published mandate and governance framework that explicitly prohibits advocacy for either side. The facilitator’s role would be to surface concerns that conventional consultation channels miss - particularly the identity, heritage, and cumulative impact issues our research identified – and to identify where genuine opportunities for collaboration or adaptation exist, even at this stage.

Outputs from this process would not be binding but could inform the developer’s thinking and could meaningfully shape the final Development Consent Order submission to the Planning Inspectorate.

For example, dialogue might reveal consensus around specific mitigation measures, community benefit priorities, or decommissioning guarantees that strengthen the application’s social and environmental credentials. Even where full agreement proves elusive, the process might help to establish a foundation of trust to support improved relationships throughout the project’s lifecycle.

Below are just a few illustrations of where we see such potential through the kind of deeper dialogue we describe above:

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1. Community perceptions that the developer has negative attitudes towards community concerns have increased community resistance, including among more pragmatic community members. Efforts to reframe the language used to describe divergent stakeholder views on the project would be an important first step in recognising the legitimacy of local concerns.
2. Most community stakeholders believe their community will be fundamentally changed by the presence of the project, regardless of the technical mitigations implemented. Concerted efforts to work with local farmers, clubs, and community groups to build future skills and capabilities would demonstrate a recognition of the impact the project may have on the area's current way of life.
2. Most stakeholders question the temporary nature of the project and are concerned that future liabilities will revert to landowners. Commitments to ensure that decommissioning and any community benefits arrangements are transferred to any future owner of the project would go a long way to allay these concerns.
3. More broadly, the developer could explore the potential for increased coordination and collaboration with other developers and local authorities to address common issues raised by communities as a result of the cumulative impact of multiple proposed solar projects.

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This could include: establishing joint regional heritage protection frameworks that preserve landscape character and historical features across project boundaries; coordinated engagement with the farming industry to develop shared protocols for land stewardship, agricultural skills transition, and maintaining supply chain viability; or district-wide arrangements to address shared technical concerns – such as fire safety standards and decommissioning liabilities – to provide communities with more robust, consistent assurances than fragmented project-by-project commitments.

Independently facilitated dialogue: what's in it for stakeholders?

For communities, the traditional planning process often presents a binary choice: oppose the project entirely (a strategy with a low success rate for NSIPs) or accept it passively or pragmatically. Independently facilitated dialogue can offer a third, more empowering path: agency over the outcome.

- 1. Procedural justice - being heard matters:** An independent facilitator can ensure that residents are not merely 'consultees' filling out a form, but participants in a conversation where their local knowledge is treated with respect and weight. This can restore a sense of dignity and voice that the NSIP regime often strips away.
- 2. Influence over both 'if' and 'how':** While the principle of development is sometimes decided by national policy (i.e. in the case of NSIPs), dialogue can give communities genuine leverage over critical local aspects. If dialogue occurs early enough in the development process, this includes the potential for influencing substantive project re-design, strategic investments in jobs, skills and local capacity, and collaborative work to protect and in some cases enhance the things that people value.

Importantly, it may also be the case that opposition expressed in genuine dialogue prompts the developer to reconsider and select alternative sites or models. The developer may, for example, judge that 'social licence' for the project is unattainable or that reputational risks are too high (see also the section below).

3. **Dialogue can address deeper issues outside the planning system's scope:** While planning law focuses on environmental impact, archaeological heritage, and operational disruption, community members often care deeply about social cohesion, economic viability of local businesses, or preservation of cultural identity – concerns that are legitimate but less tangible and hard to 'plan for.' Facilitated dialogue can allow these to be named, understood, and potentially addressed through project design, local partnerships or community investment arrangements. Even where some concerns cannot be fully resolved, the process itself – in which communities are genuinely heard rather than overruled – can help communities come to terms with unwanted change.
4. **Securing tangible community benefits:** Adversarial processes often result in standard, transactional community benefit packages. Through structured dialogue, communities can negotiate tailored benefits that address actual local needs through alignment with local development/regional development plans.

Independently facilitated dialogue: what's in it for developers?

Until now, almost all NSIP renewable energy projects have been approved once they have been accepted for examination and none have seen their applications rejected on the grounds of community opposition or inadequate consultation alone. In this light, the incentive for developers to engage in the kind of dialogue we describe might seem limited at first glance. This impression will be amplified once the Planning and Infrastructure Bill receives

royal assent and the statutory duty to consult is removed.³² It is also worth noting here that there is no statutory requirement for consultation around smaller projects (<50MW) for which decision making power rests with local authorities.

However, based on our international experience unlocking complex disputes around energy and resource projects, we believe that there are compelling reasons for developers of both NSIPs and local authority-controlled projects to continue to consult AND to enhance their consultation approach by convening independently facilitated dialogue processes.

- 1. Improved planning outcomes in a shifting political climate:** For projects less than 50MW, where local authorities retain decision-making power, documented dialogue can significantly strengthen applications by demonstrating genuine community consideration. For NSIPs, while approval rates have historically been high, the political climate is evolving – robust, independently facilitated engagement may become increasingly critical for securing consent and political support as infrastructure scrutiny intensifies.
- 2. Managing reputational risk and management overload:** Organised opposition to renewable projects is now commonplace, with action group campaigns – increasingly inter-connected and online³³ – generating significant reputational risk and consuming substantial management resources. Effective engagement that builds meaningful community relationships offers clear business benefits and

³² [Infrastructure reform could silence Suffolk's communities in 'energy onslaught' - Suffolk County Council](#)

³³ [How Scottish campaigners are using AI to battle rural planning applications | Financial Times](#)

can help to lower the temperature of increasingly heated local debates.

3. Improved community relations without undue delay:

Germany's BePart research examined participation processes across ~200 wind, solar, and grid projects. This found that meaningful participation had “little to no impact on project timelines” for onshore wind and solar; delays were typically driven by permitting procedures rather than public engagement; well-planned participation tailored to local conditions actively reduced conflict and accelerated delivery. The SuedOstLink transmission line exemplifies this approach: facilitated by an independent environmental mediation bureau, it de-escalated a polarised Bavaria-Federal Government conflict, demonstrating that professionally facilitated dialogue can restore constructive engagement even in highly adversarial settings.³⁴

4. Enhanced social license to operate: Genuine community engagement creates resilience in an era of rising environmental activism and political resistance to energy infrastructure. When dialogue produces improved communication and relationships, communities become invested in responsible project delivery, helping to shift relationships from active opposition to collaborative partnership.

5. Reduced judicial review risk and less problematic examinations: Although the Planning and Infrastructure Bill removes statutory consultation requirements, government guidance and precedent continue to emphasize adequate

³⁴ [Spieker, A. \(2018\) Stakeholder Dialogues and Virtual Reality for the German Energiewende](#)

engagement. Projects with evidence of documented dialogue may be less vulnerable to judicial review and less problematic Planning Inspectorate examination, as concerns may have been already substantially resolved.

6. **Countering political weaponisation:** The perceived democratic deficit in UK energy planning at both national and local levels is contributing to project-level opposition. With some political parties adopting anti-renewables positions and action groups pursuing delay strategies to erode political support, trust-building at project level is essential. Developers expanding renewable portfolios have a long-term strategic interest in demonstrating genuine openness to community relationships.

4. Concluding comments

The trust deficit in UK renewable energy planning reflects a planning system that concentrates decision-making power away from affected communities and accelerating infrastructure deployment without commensurate investment in rebuilding legitimacy. The result is a paradox: the UK has world-leading renewable energy targets but an eroding social license to deliver them locally.

Our research in Lincolnshire – combined with our experience working on numerous international projects – leads us to believe that a different path is possible. Independently facilitated dialogue, when implemented with genuine independence and procedural rigor, can:

1. Help communities engage meaningfully and openly with important and complex issues of whether and how a project might work for them;
2. Help developers understand and respond to legitimate concerns rather than dismissing opposition as inherent obstruction;
3. Clarify where genuine compromise is possible and where disagreements are fundamental;
4. Restore procedural fairness to a planning system in which communities have felt increasingly powerless.

We are not proposing dialogue as a panacea. Some opposition to renewable energy reflects fundamental values incompatible with large-scale infrastructure – and those voices deserve to be heard and respected. But for the many projects where opposition stems from feeling unheard, from unclear information, or from

resolvable concerns about design and local impacts, dialogue offers a more constructive pathway than the current planning model.

The window for rebuilding trust in renewable energy planning is narrowing. The removal of statutory consultation requirements from the Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025 could accelerate project deployment but risks widening the legitimacy gap. Political parties are weaponising local energy concerns to challenge the net zero consensus. Without a deliberate shift toward genuine dialogue at project level, the national politics of renewable energy could turn – threatening not only individual projects but the broader consensus on the UK's energy future.

The cost of inaction is far higher than the cost of dialogue.

Glossary of key terms

Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)

A technology often built alongside solar farms (like the proposed Leoda project) that stores electricity for use when the sun isn't shining.

Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land

Government classification for the most productive agricultural land (Grades 1, 2, and 3a). Planning policy generally seeks to protect this land from development.

Community Liaison Group (CLG)

A forum established by a developer to provide updates and answer questions from local representatives. Our paper notes these often suffer from being developer-led rather than truly collaborative.

Development Consent Order (DCO)

The specific type of planning permission required for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. Unlike normal planning applications decided by local councils, this is a statutory order made by the government.

Independent facilitation

The core approach proposed in this paper: a dialogue process managed by a neutral third party who ensures fair participation, rather than by the developer or the community.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP)

Large-scale energy projects (like solar farms over 50MW/100MW from 2026) that are considered critical to the UK's national needs. Decisions on these bypass local councils and are made by the Secretary of State.

Net Zero

The legal target for the UK to remove as much carbon from the atmosphere as it emits by 2050. This national target drives the "Clean Power 2030" acceleration mentioned in the text.

Non-statutory consultation

An initial, voluntary phase of public engagement undertaken by developers before the formal legal process begins. This is often where communities first learn of a proposal.

Planning Inspectorate

The national body that examines NSIP applications and recommends to the Secretary of State whether they should be approved or rejected.

Procedural justice

A psychological concept describing fairness in decision-making. Our paper argues that if communities feel the process was fair and they were genuinely heard (even if they dislike the outcome), trust and acceptance increase.

PV arrays

Photovoltaic arrays; the technical term for the rows of solar panels that generate electricity.

Statutory consultation

The formal, legally required period of public consultation that developers must conduct under the Planning Act 2008 before submitting their application.

Secretary of State (for Energy Security and Net Zero)

The government minister who holds the final decision-making power for all NSIPs, rather than local planning authorities.