



RENEWABLES IN THE HERTFORDSHIRE LANDSCAPE

INFRASTRUCTURE CHARRETTE NO.9

SUMMER 2025



Lord Salisbury and Anthony Downs opened the ninth Infrastructure Charrette in The Riding School, Hatfield Park.

FOREWORD

The decarbonisation of the energy system is one of the critical challenges of our time. The generation of clean energy is central to our response to the climate crisis, the cost of living crisis and, increasingly, an issue of national security. However, decarbonising the energy system whilst protecting our rural landscape, valuing our communities and maintaining a home-grown supply of food is a difficult balance to strike.

This charrette was the ninth in the infrastructure series. It brought together landowners, developers, academics and community representatives to open the conversation of balancing energy sources with food security, landscape and community impact. As ever, these discussions were challenging and constructive.

There sometimes seems an inevitability to conflict when discussing energy schemes. The imposition of wind turbines, solar panels or battery storage facilities on

rural communities can feel extreme. Farmers, and particularly tenants, may find themselves dissatisfied with the way their concerns are being addressed.

We believe there is a better way. This summary paper captures the spirit of the event; open, informed and committed to finding common ground. I am grateful to all those who contributed their time, expertise and perspectives. These voices are helping to shape a more positive future for the Hertfordshire landscape.

We look forward to continuing the conversation and to working together to ensure that renewable energy development enhances, rather than compromises, the landscapes and communities we cherish.

Anthony Downs
Estate Director – Hatfield Park
Gascoyne Estates

THROUGH MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT
WITH COMMUNITIES, TENANTS AND
EXPERTS, WE BELIEVE A BALANCE CAN BE
ACHIEVED ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

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INTRODUCTION

On Thursday 17th July 2025, Gascoyne Estates hosted the ninth Infrastructure Charrette in The Riding School at Hatfield Park.

This event had a focus on renewable energy development in Hertfordshire's rural and agricultural landscapes. Land managers, farmers, developers, politicians and key members of the community were invited to attend.

In his opening remarks, Lord Salisbury acknowledged the growing pressure to adopt renewable energy in the face of climate change and reduction of fossil fuel usage. There are financial and environmental benefits to this, however it is not without consequences to the surrounding environment. The goal of this charette was to freely debate the implications so that we may better manage them as schemes come forward.

Beginning from a position that more renewable energy generation is a necessary and welcome proposition, the key issues discussed were:

LANDSCAPE FOOD SECURITY COMMUNITY

Each session comprised short contributions from expert speakers, following by a panel discussion and Q&A. This set the scene for a workshop in the final session, in which delegates took on an alternative persona and sought to negotiate a positive outcome to a development case study.

This paper summarises proceedings and highlights the key points which emerged in the discussion.



SESSION 1: LANDSCAPE

Peter Waine OBE Campaign to Protect Rural England

Peter Waine is the Chair of Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Hertfordshire and a former chairman of the CPRE nationally.

He presented his passion for protecting the English countryside and advocated for the prioritisation of the use of solar on residential and commercial rooftops and brownfield land.

According to Peter, the main question for development and solar installation is location. Currently, 59% of solar farms are installed on productive farmland, and one third of those are on farmland with the highest productive capacity.

He also cast doubt on the characterisation

of solar installations as 'temporary'. Peter claimed that once the generating assets are installed, it is unlikely for the land to be reinstated to its current productive use in 40-50 years' time.

Peter noted that the CPRE is not against renewable energy development. Instead, they would like greater transparency of debate, and to utilise buildings instead of high-grade agricultural land.

He concluded his remarks with a quote from Bill Bryson, CPRE's President, taken from his book *The Road to Little Dribbling*:

“THERE ISN'T A LANDSCAPE IN THE WORLD THAT IS MORE ARTFULLY WORKED, MORE LOVELY TO BEHOLD, MORE COMFORTABLE TO BE IN, THAN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF GREAT BRITAIN. IT IS THE LARGEST PARK, ITS MOST PERFECT ACCIDENTAL GARDEN. I THINK IT MAY BE THE BRITISH NATION'S MOST GLORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT.”



Michelle Bolger Michelle Bolger Expert Landscape Consultants



CONSIDERING THE LOCATION OF DEVELOPMENT IS A SENSITIVE CHOICE. PLACEMENT NEEDS TO REFLECT THE SUITABILITY OF THE PRESENT NEED, AND THE FUTURE OF THE LAND.

Michelle is an expert in landscape planning, and explains when siting renewable energy generation, location is the crucial factor. Valued landscapes - particularly designated landscapes - should be conserved and enhanced, not used to accommodate large installation, she stated.

Michelle explained that landscape sensitivity is the combination of its value and its susceptibility.

Landscape value is inherent - it may be for a particular characteristic or designation. Susceptibility is the key determinant for planning, establishing to what extent the landscape value is compromised by the new addition.

Features such as topography, scale, skylines, and size are all elements which impact the suitability of a site to be used. Topographically complex landscapes are seen as less appropriate for development, where well screened sites can be delivered with less harm.

Michelle highlighted the importance of taking a long-term view of the landscape. Mitigating installations by adding natural features, such as trees, would ensure that the landscape is enhanced in perpetuity once the energy infrastructure is removed.

A key point Michelle made was that infrastructure tends to have a cumulative effect. Where infrastructure such as pylons and cables are already in place, she argued, there is a tendency to think that 'it doesn't harm to have more'. Michelle encouraged us to consider the cumulative impact of development and ensure that it is properly planned and its impact shared across the landscape.

In both contributions, the presence of 'wrong' or 'bad' locations implied the possibility of a 'good' or 'correct' location for such projects. This thread was followed in the subsequent panel discussion.

Group Discussion

Both panellists were then invited to join a discussion with the audience, chaired by Dr Judith Plummer-Braeckman, a fellow at the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. The panel discussed renewable energy siting, starting with the prompt:

“LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. WHY DO WE GET IT WRONG AND HOW DO WE GET IT RIGHT?”

The first key theme that emerged from this discussion was the need for strategic planning of energy infrastructure. In many cases, it was argued, sites are proposed because they were available rather than because they are optimal.

It was noted that the lack of effective planning policy and the fragmentation of decision making bodies may also lead to lower quality outcomes. The panel advocated for liaising with policy makers to encourage the clarification

- and bolstering - of policy, including the inclusion of solar panels on new developments.

Finally, the panellists were asked whether there were any notably 'good' examples of renewable energy developments.



While they were unable to think of many, they argued that it could be possible if a long-term view of the landscape was prioritised.



SESSION 2: FOOD SECURITY

Professor David Barling
University of Hertfordshire

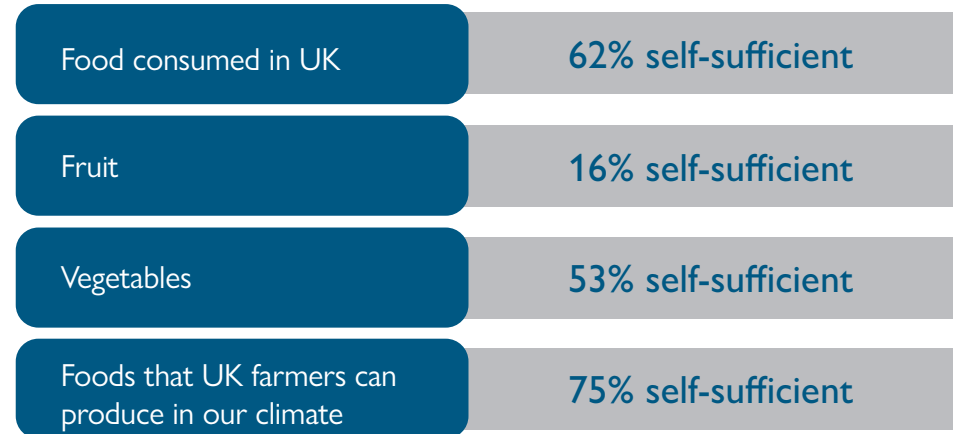


Professor David Barling, Professor of Food Security at the University of Hertfordshire, opened this discussion. He provided a comprehensive definition of food security:

“ALL PEOPLE, AT ALL TIMES, HAVE PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD THAT MEETS DIETARY NEEDS AND FOOD PREFERENCES FOR AN ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFE”

David explained that government food security assessments are undertaken every three years. They measure six key aspects including global food availability, supply chain resilience and expenditure on food.

David drew a distinction between 'food security' and 'self-sufficiency'. He explained that the UK Government assesses food security to be broadly acceptable at present. Self-sufficiency refers to the proportion of calories consumed in the UK which are produced in the UK, which indicates that we import approximately 38% of our food.



He explained how food supply chains have several points of vulnerability before they reach consumers. The variability of inputs (such as seeds, fertiliser and labour) can place farming businesses under stress, while losses associated with diseases, storage, and transportation can cause further wastage in the system. All of this can result in lower availability of quality food at a good price.

UK production levels are increasingly impacted by extreme weather, sometimes resulting in lower yields. An extremely wet winter in 2023/24 has been followed by an astonishingly dry spring in 2025. This is one factor which has contributed to food price inflation, which increased to 36% between January 2021 and April 2025.



David highlighted the complexity of the policy landscape relating to land and food security. He noted the Environmental Land Management Scheme, which provides grants for environmental additions to farms which boost farming resilience. These sit alongside the Agriculture Act 2020 and the 2023 Environment Improvement Plan, setting the long-term vision for land

management in England. Critically, the government is also developing the National Food Policy Strategy, which seeks to create a food system which is healthier for people and the planet, and supports the agricultural transition. Finally, David called on the government to consider food security part of national security, and apply consistent effort to enhancing it.

Rob Wise National Farmers Union

Rob is the regional environmental advisor for the National Farmers Union in East Anglia. He opened his discussion with a quote from the NFU president, Tom Bradshaw:

“IF MINISTERS TRULY BELIEVE THEIR OWN WORDS AND TAKE EXPERTS SERIOUSLY, THEY’LL SEIZE THIS MOMENT TO PUT FOOD SECURITY AT THE HEART OF OUR NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY”

Rob believes there is complacency regarding food security and mentions that it barely features in forward planning and should be reassessed as a critical part of national infrastructure.

After the Second World War, there was

a drive to produce as much British food as possible. Hedgerows were removed to increase agricultural production, and chemical input use surged. Since then, Rob highlighted, UK self-sufficiency peaked at 78% in 1984, before steadily declining to today's 62%.

Rob explained how the NFU has a 2040 net zero ambition. This requires shifting a lot of energy production onto farmland, though he argued that the priority must remain agricultural production. For some NFU members, the financial returns for having energy production on farmland can be better than food production. He echoed other contributors, saying that energy production sites should be located on lower quality agricultural land, and where possible, rooftop and farm buildings. However he acknowledged that utility scale generation would be critical in some cases.



Joe Stanley GWCT Allerton Project



Joe is the Head of Sustainable Farming for the GWCT Allerton Project, researching the effects of farming methods on wildlife and the environment.

He stated the importance of researching how to co-locate food production with the natural environment. He argued that some land managers have become engaged in the natural capital and biodiversity debate, forgetting food production.

Agriculture accounts for 70% of the UK's land, and 70% of that is grassland. Joe advocated for multi-functional land use, such as farming with large margins to provide space for nature within a productive system. He also argued that if our primary concern is food security, the UK Government should focus on far

greater production of fruit and vegetables, arguably at the expense of livestock feed, energy crops and perhaps even barley for whisky.

Joe advocated for wind turbines as an example of multi-functionality, because of their small footprint enabling farming to continue around them.

Joe acknowledged that energy installations can be controversial, and advocated for a more innovative approach. He provided examples from Eastern Europe with solar panels to be installed in rows which still enabled machinery to pass between them. While less efficient than a higher density installation, it demonstrates clearly that conflicts in land use can be overcome with some imagination.

Group Discussion

Jorge Mendonça, CEO of Gascoyne Estates, led the next discussion, focussing on how we have a more nuanced public discussion about food security.

There was a clear sense that food security and energy security are component parts of national security. There are opportunities to create more resilient farming businesses by engaging with energy in the right locations, while focussing on producing the right food in the right places.

The panel advocated for a reimagining of the food marketplace and attitudes

towards it. Presently, there is too much focus on choice and cheap prices, that farms are barely able to sustain themselves. A shift to prioritising good quality, valued produce is required, rather than the current situation which favours consumer choice and low prices.

The theme of strategic planning also re-emerged, with the discussion clearly identifying the need for a national approach to optimising land use. There was cautious optimism that the land use framework may be helpful in this regard, paving the way to a more coordinated approach.



SESSION 3: COMMUNITY

Emma Sturdy Save Old Malton Countryside

Emma Sturdy is a tenant farmer at Eden Farm in Old Malton, North Yorkshire. Her story opened the session, outlining the impact of a solar installation without communication with tenant farmers.

Emma conveyed her experience of how her family and farming business was affected by the submission of planning permission for solar installation across over 110 acres of her families tenanted land, without prior consultation from the landowner. Emma's family farm the land under an Agricultural Holdings Act tenancy, and were the second generation to farm at Eden.

She argued that the lack of planning and communication between the developer, landowner and tenant, resulted in conflicting interests, and a loss of trust and transparency. By treating tenant farmers as partners in the project and communicating more openly, it might have been possible to have a more positive experience for all.

Instead, Save Old Malton Countryside appealed the solar planning application, which gained support across the agricultural sector and wider community.

Emma highlighted the difficulty of running a tenanted farm with restrictions on business activity. While farmers who own their land stand to gain from the income associated with energy projects, Emma noted that tenants need to be at a certain scale to survive.

Finally, she proposed that tenants should be able to benefit from this energy transition, either through compensation or through partnership in the project. Emma encouraged the attendees to think about the impacts on farming families, and engage with them openly, meaningfully and transparently.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY TO
ENGAGE WHICH RESULTS IN
BETTER OUTCOMES FOR ALL



Neil Lindsay BLC Energy

Neil Lindsay is the Managing Director of BLC Energy and has over 20 years of experience in developing renewable energy projects in the UK and Africa.

Covering the importance of community engagement, Neil made an important case for the role of public awareness and involvement for the installation of solar panels. The community needs to be defined, and those affected identified. Engagement with these groups need to be early and accessible, to allow the best opportunity for people to take part in discussions. He also explained the role technology can have in visualising the project, helping to gain feedback from locals.

Key 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' were given by Neil:

Do

- Engage Early
- Be accessible
- Answer questions honestly
- Give time to understand the project
- Go over and above minimum requirements
- Arrange site visits

Don't

- Pay lip service to the process
- Be in a rush
- Try to link community benefit to community consent

Neil's advice allows for the community to feel valued and involved in decisions. Critically, he advocates for proactively reaching younger members of the community, who stand to be most affected in the long term.



Emma Fletcher Octopus Energy

Emma is the Low Carbon Homes Director at Octopus Energy. She outlined her experience planning and developing a zero-carbon heat network within her own community's Land Trust.

She detailed how the creation of the heat network was enabled by the collaboration between the community and landowners to develop the infrastructure upon low-grade agricultural land and disused farm buildings.

Emma explained how the new heating network was integrated with a wildlife conservation site, borehole fields under a stewardship program, and a small solar farm with battery storage, ensuring the design reflects the landscape and minimises visual impact on the community. By taking

the village off oil, she explained that the project saves 1,100 tonnes of carbon annually.

She argued that it is possible to make renewable energy work for local communities, creating a stable and competitive price which is not prone to market fluctuations. Emma highlighted that this helps people realise that engaging with and shaping development often leads to better outcomes for communities, rather than objecting by default.

"THERE IS DEMAND FROM RESIDENTS WANTING RENEWABLE ENERGY THAT WILL POSITIVELY IMPACT THEM"



Group Discussion



The final discussion was led by Anthony Downs, Estate Director at Hatfield Park, focussing on how we engage communities with renewable energy developments.

The panel agreed that more open discussions need to be had with parties affected by new developments, from tenant farmers to local schools. Public engagement is vital in planning, as it helps communities to understand the importance of projects, and how it can benefit them in return.

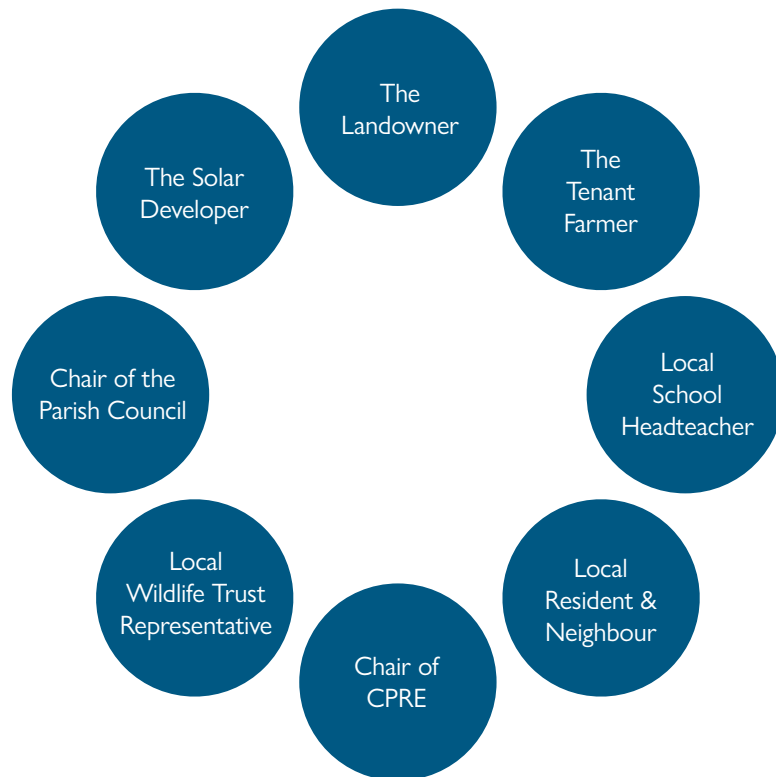
During this discussion, the panel agreed that the most important factors for communities are fairness, education and involvement. Encouraging site visits and being genuinely receptive to feedback allows for richer conversations.

It is clear that community consent is not as simple as the establishment of a benefit fund, which may be considered 'buying support'. Instead, it requires consistent, open and transparent conversations which help to shape the outcome.

Workshop

To conclude the charette, all attendees took part in a workshop. Each table was presented with a theoretical case study and eight personas, each with their own priorities, opportunities and constraints. Attendees had to adopt a persona least like themselves, then negotiate an outcome from that point of view. The ultimate aim

was to achieve a scheme which all could be satisfied with. Resources were provided, including maps showing the various tenancy agreements, rights of way, farmland grade, and the visual impact. The activity stimulated interesting debates, as participants delved deeper into their personas and articulated unexpected viewpoints.



There was collective engagement throughout the task. The feedback and final decision proposed by each group in response to the development scenario were similar and key elements were highlighted

by all, with a particular focus on avoiding the areas of highest landscape harm. Critically, it was noted that the workshop forced attendees to see projects from an opposing perspective, reframing how they will approach their own work.





Conclusion

The challenge of accommodating renewable energy schemes into a landscape such as Hertfordshire's should not be understated.

The views, walks and rural way of life that many have become accustomed to have real value, and any interventions in that landscape should be carefully considered.

This charrette highlighted several key points:

- There is broad support for new renewable energy - the key question is where.
- Questions of landscape are emotive, but should be considered with high levels of technical rigour. The right place for a renewable energy scheme is where the land is available and suitable.

- Renewable energy does not pose a meaningful threat to food security. Wider issues, such as what we grow and how we eat, are bigger issues. Food security and energy security are two equally important aspects of our national security.
- Communities cannot be bought. Working with the community, including tenant farmers, to deliver meaningful benefit to all is the only way to achieve community consent.
- Only by placing ourselves in the shoes of others can we expect to achieve equitable outcomes.

We would like to thank all of our contributors and attendees for a stimulating and courteous debate.





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