

# WELCOME

## Welcome to our latest charrette on renewable energy.

The Hatfield Estate has been holding charrettes for nearly twenty years.

The pressures for housing development are increasing, particularly in counties like Hertfordshire.

Landowners like the estate are presented with a number of options, many of them mutually contradictory. For instance, we all want to preserve our countryside and enhance it. At the same time we have to recognise that demand for housing is relentless and people must have decent places to live in communities that work.

Twenty years ago, we decided to respond to these pressures by doing our best to square the circle, but we felt strongly that without asking the views of our neighbours before announcing our proposals, we could not expect the approval of the community in which we live.

The mechanism we used to consult our neighbours and to involve them in developing our plans was the “charrette”, a term derived from 18th century French architectural schools. Essentially, we held extended meetings, sometimes over several weeks, generally open to all, to discuss and amend a draft master plan. Generally, agreement resulted and the original draft plans were substantially improved.

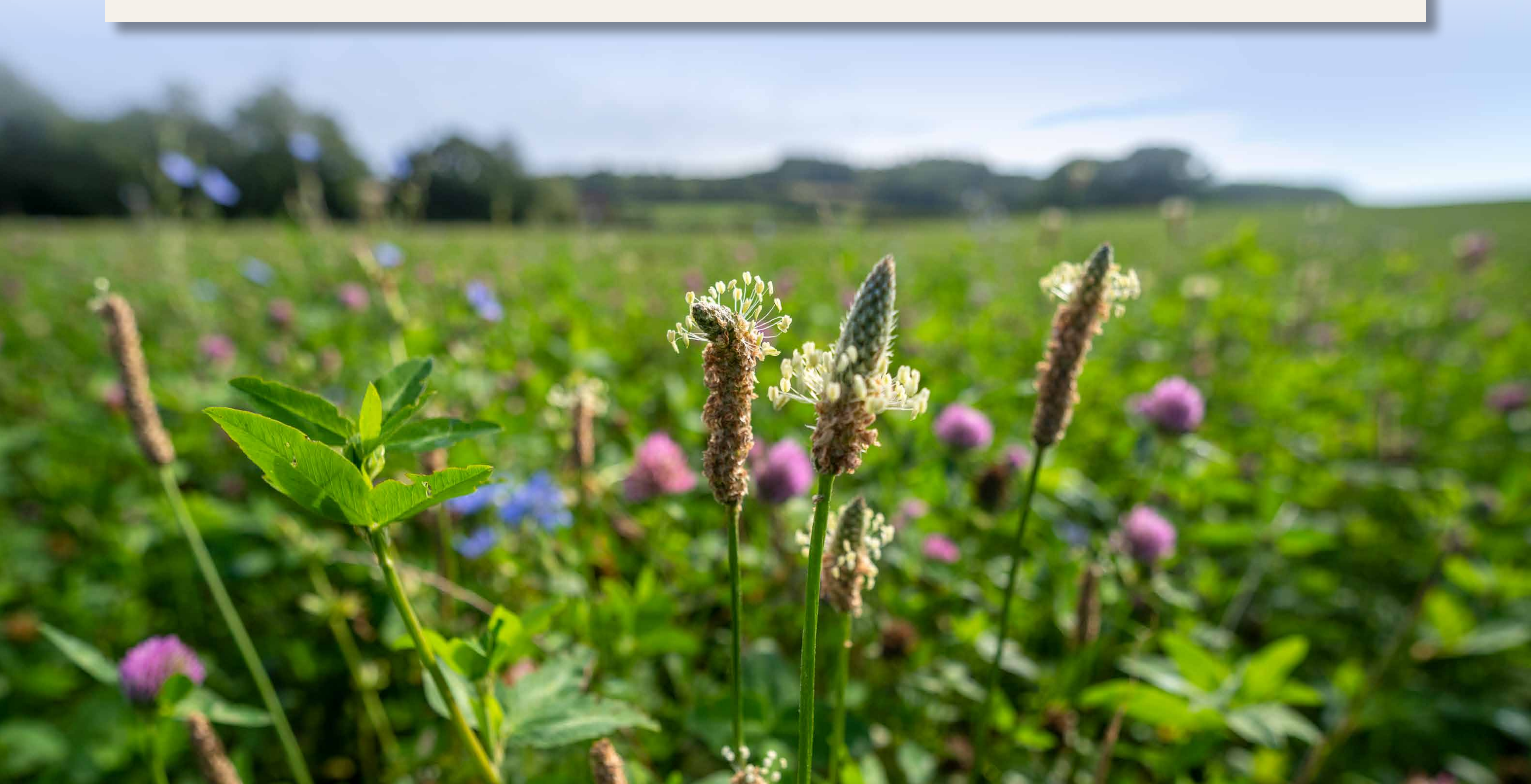
Today’s charrette is not about building houses. It is about generating eco-friendly energy.

Landowners are under increasing pressure from the government to devote big acreages to solar farms in particular. This poses a distinct threat to stretches of countryside, but equally there can be little doubt of our need to diversify our energy supply for both ecological and security reasons. Here is yet another contradiction, not dissimilar to the one that informs the housing debate.

I hope that today’s charrette will see the beginnings of a consensus emerge.

As with housing, it is better for those of us who live here to agree on what should happen rather than for central government to take advantage of local discord to impose a truly unpopular outcome.

Today we will not discuss any particular proposals, but these will undoubtedly emerge given the present climate. If we can agree today on criteria by which we can judge those proposals when we do have to face them, we will have taken an important step towards building a local consensus.





# WHAT IS A CHARRETTE?

A charrette is an interactive form of consultation where all interested parties are able to be involved and contribute to the conversation.

The word originates in France, where in the 19th century a charrette – or cart – would be wheeled among student architects to pick up their models and other work for it to be reviewed or exhibited.

The Local Government Association says:

“

*Executed well, they harness the best of local knowledge, helping to deliver plans which not only have the support of the community, but which are the best fit for their locality.*

*A charrette works by bringing local stakeholders together with a design team to work up a complete plan... Once stakeholders have [considered] everything they would like to see from a site, the design team goes away and puts together plans which are then brought back to the stakeholders for further comment, followed by more revision until a final plan is arrived at.*

”



Because we recognise that development can be contentious, Gascoyne Estates have used charrettes to look at many of the issues which lie at the heart of growth and development.

Engaging with local communities who might be affected by a development is a vital part of the planning process, enabling them to collaborate with designers on a vision for their future.

In 2016, Gascoyne Cecil hosted the Stanboroughbury and Symondshyde Charrette, to meet local housing demand and to respond to a call for sites in the Local Plan process.

We felt these sites had the potential to see the delivery of carefully designed, built and managed communities.

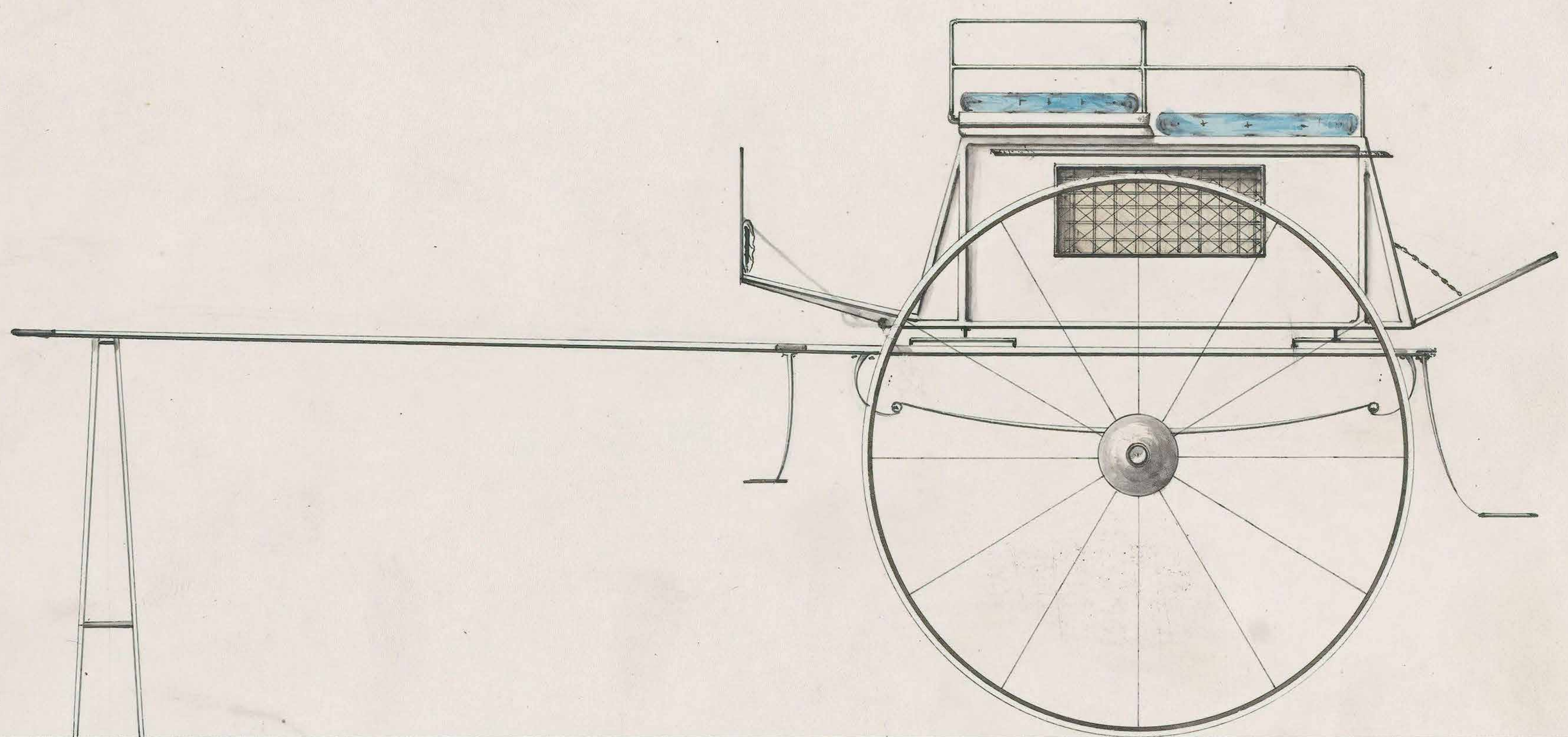
The charrette was a vital part of this process, encouraging conversations about the location, design and vision for these proposals.

Alongside our charrettes focused on particular projects or proposals, we have also conducted Infrastructure Charrettes.

These events focused on county-wide issues, such as:

- Transport (March 2018)
- Workplaces (June 2018)
- The Digital Economy (October 2018)
- East-West Connectivity (February 2019)
- The Future of Land (October 2023)

More recently, we held an event which looked at renewable energy schemes in the Hertfordshire landscape.





# RENEWABLE ENERGY

## GLOBALLY

In 2023, 133 countries from across the world pledged to increase the pace and scale of the deployment of renewable energy.

They agreed that to prevent a catastrophic rise in global temperatures, the world needed to install three times more renewable energy capacity by 2030.

The conference said:



“ Unprecedented adverse climate impacts are increasingly threatening the resilience of agriculture and food systems as well as the ability of many, especially the most vulnerable, to produce and access food in the face of mounting hunger, malnutrition, and economic stresses. ”



## NATIONALLY

In 2019, the UK Government set a legally binding target of carbon net zero by the year 2050.

Today there is ongoing national policy support for the deployment of new renewable energy projects to help meet that target.

The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan sets out to:


- Maintain a secure and affordable energy supply in an increasingly unstable world.
- Create new industries and investments around the country.
- Protect the environment we live in from the most damaging effects of climate change.

Traditionally, Britain relied on coal as the source for all electricity and gas.

This meant power stations were built near large coal fields, and the electricity flowed from there in a complex, national web.

In the 1970s, North Sea gas replaced coal gas in the nation’s cookers, boilers and factories.





Department for  
Energy Security  
& Net Zero

Although cleaner than coal, gas still produces carbon emissions which contribute to climate change. Today, only 40% of the gas we use comes from UK waters, and the proportion is falling as our own supplies are depleted.

The Government is encouraging the use of more solar panels, wind turbines and small modular nuclear reactors, as well as battery energy storage, to replace all fossil fuels in our energy mix.



## LOCALLY

Many local authorities across the country have declared climate emergencies. Locally, they include:

- Welwyn Hatfield District Council
- Hertsmere Borough Council
- Hertfordshire County Council

They have all pledged to be carbon neutral themselves by 2030 and support the aim of net zero by 2050.

In Welwyn Hatfield, records show there are no operational solar farms. There are planning applications in progress, or approved, for 14 megawatts (MW), largely in the 10MW Stanborough Solar Array.

It is estimated that around 4,000 to 5,000 homes could be powered by 14MW. There are around 55,000 homes in the borough.





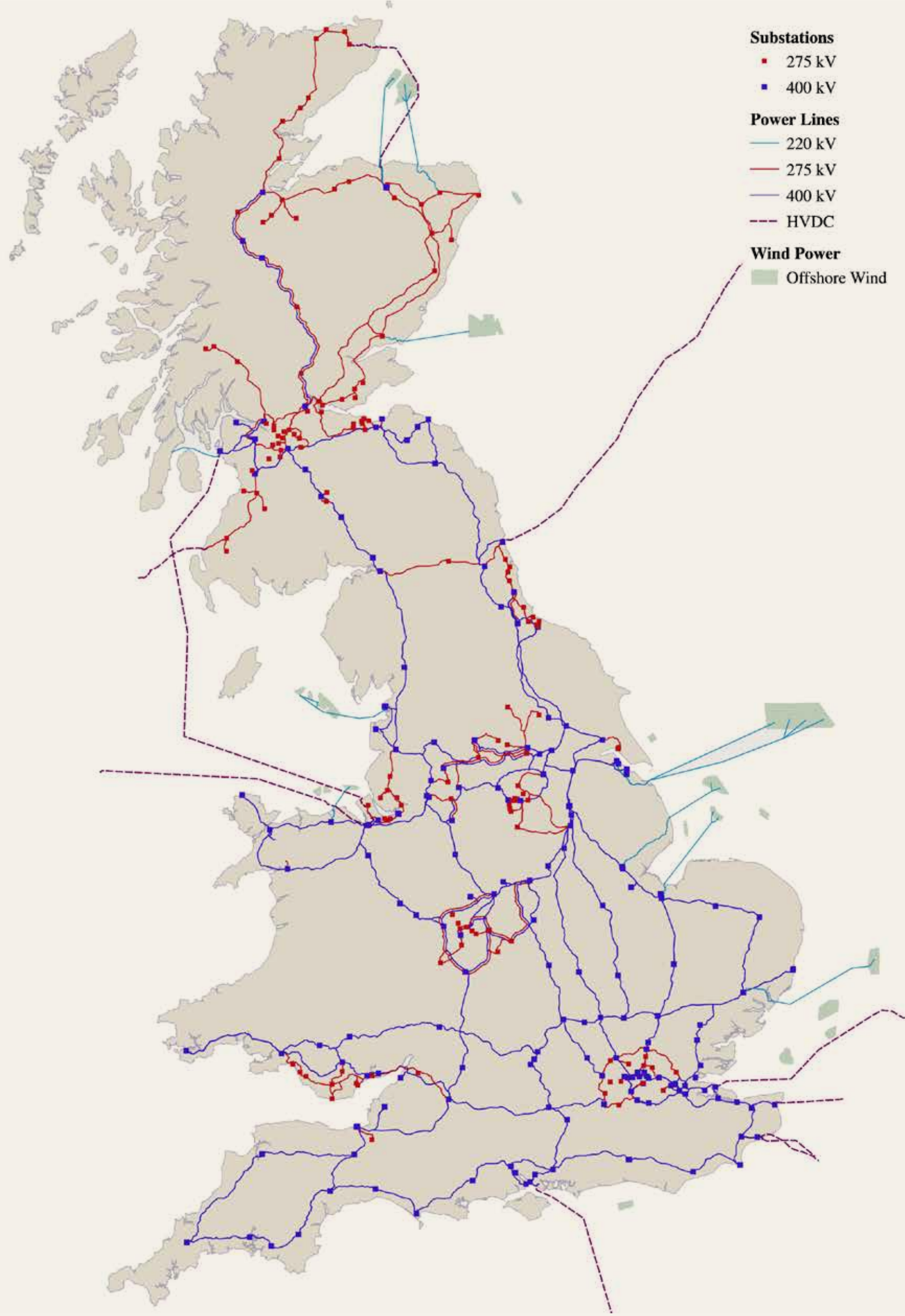
# WHAT DO DEVELOPERS WANT?

The national electricity grid was originally built around where power was generated and where it was needed.

It was originally designed to match supply with demand. Today, the location of the demand is largely as it always has been – our homes, workplaces, retail outlets and hospitals. But the location of the supply is changing rapidly.

Historically, power stations were built on coalfields in the north of England, the Midlands, South Wales and Scotland. From there, electricity spread out like a web. This worked well when coal was the main fuel.

But burning coal is the most polluting way to generate electricity. The last coal-fired power station was closed down last year. We are now seeing a rapid growth in renewables. As such, we should now consider where these renewable technologies, such as solar and wind generation should best be located.



## Key factors developers consider:

- Location:** For solar, the location is important and the east and south of England are considered the “sweet spot” as this is where solar intensity is highest, while for onshore wind, wind speed and load factors are key.
- Grid connections:** Sites close to existing connections or large end users are more viable. Without this, new cables and pylons are costly and disruptive.
- Transmission loss:** The further electricity travels, the more is lost – so proximity matters from a financial and ecological perspective.
- Scale and suitability:** Projects must be technically viable, and in suitable landscapes.
- Willing landowners:** Land is usually required to be available for 30–40 years to host the necessary infrastructure, whether it is solar panels or wind turbines.



## THE PLANNING PROCESS

Even with willing landowners in suitable locations, developers also crucially need planning permission. The project’s output will determine whether an application is granted permission from a local planning authority, or via a Development Consent Order (DCO) which would be granted by the relevant Secretary of State.

- Local planning application:** For projects with an output of less than 100MW. Until the end of 2024, this threshold was less than 50MW.
- Development Consent Order (DCO):** For larger proposals known as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

The change in threshold partly reflects the efficiency of new solar panels. The limit was determined in 2008 but, almost 20 years later, it requires much less land area to generate 50MW today than it did then.



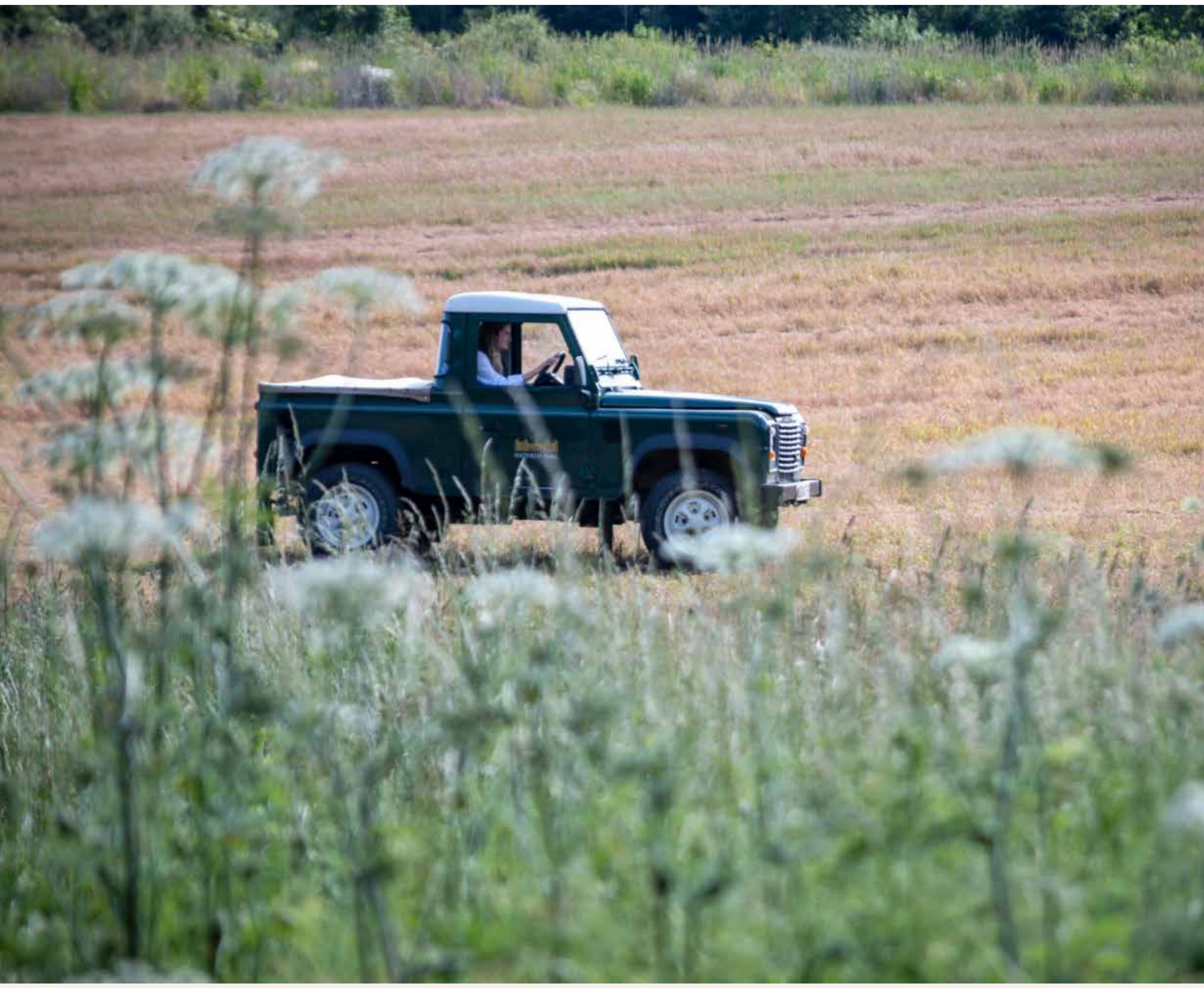


# OUR VIEW

Gascoyne Estates takes a long-term view of the stewardship of its land. We believe that green energy projects are vital for creating a sustainable future and this aligns with government policy.

We understand that renewable energy projects in the countryside can be controversial. Communities often feel that such schemes are imposed on them, with little benefit or genuine engagement.

Developers frequently approach us with proposals for renewable energy projects on our land in Hertfordshire, particularly near South Mimms, Newgate Street and Essendon.



Before making any decisions about whether to enter into discussions with them we want to make sure we have fully considered, and sought the views of our neighbours on:

- The potential impact on the landscape.
- Benefits for the local community.
- Whether any rights of access will be affected or created.
- Possible impacts on food security.



The way we proceed will be informed by the conversations we are having with the local community, tenants, and those who have already experienced renewable energy developments nearby.

To guide our decision-making process, we have established three key principles:

- Tenants will be treated fairly and seen as partners throughout.
- Land must be suitable from a landscape and technical perspective.
- Open, ongoing communication and engagement are essential.





# OUR STARTING POINT

To begin the debate about renewable energy in the Hertfordshire landscape, we hosted our ninth Infrastructure Charrette.

This took the form of speakers from a wide range of backgrounds, followed by discussions and a workshop on delivering a renewable energy installation project.

These discussions focused on three key themes: Landscape, Food security and Community.

## On landscape, our speakers were:



**PETER WAIVE OBE**  
Chairman of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Hertfordshire and former national chair of the CPRE. Peter was awarded an OBE this year in the King's Birthday Honours for services to the natural environment.



**MICHELLE BOLGER**  
Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute and an expert in landscape planning. Michelle's company prepares Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments for projects going through the planning system, and specialises in providing landscape evidence for hearings and public

## Turning to food security, our speakers were:



**PROFESSOR DAVID BARLING**  
Professor of Food Policy and Security at the University of Hertfordshire. David is co-director of the Centre for Agriculture, Food and Environmental Management Research, and leads the Food Systems and Policy research group.



**ROB WISE**  
Regional environmental advisor for the National Farmers Union in East Anglia. Rob is also a trustee of Natural Cambridgeshire, a member of the Fens for the Future group, and serves on the Flood Risk Management for the Fens Technical Steering Group.



**JOE STANLEY**  
Head of Sustainable Farming for the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust Allerton Project. Joe is an experienced livestock and arable farmer and is Chair of Leicestershire, Northants and Rutland NFU.

## Focusing on community, our speakers were:



**EMMA STURDY**  
Tenant farmer at Eden Farm in Old Malton, North Yorkshire. Emma came to national prominence for her Save Old Malton Countryside campaign, which opposed a solar farm on land which her family farmed as tenants.



**NEIL LINDSAY**  
Managing Director of BLC Energy. Neil has more than 20 years' experience developing renewable energy projects in the UK and Africa, with a background in nature conservation and wildlife management.



**EMMA FLETCHER**  
Low Carbon Housing Director at Octopus Energy. Emma started her career in rural surveying and estate management, then moved into award-winning housing and regeneration developments.

The following boards look into these discussions in more detail and ask you to consider some of the key points raised.





# OUR SPEAKERS ON: LANDSCAPE

Our landscape speakers discussed:

- How we might prioritise land to be used for renewable energy production.
- What kinds of landscape might accommodate large-scale renewable energy installations.
- What might happen once temporary planning permissions had expired.

This discussion looked at where the best places to build renewable energy installations in a predominantly rural county such as Hertfordshire might be.

The opinion of the CPRE was that, particularly when it comes to solar power, location was the key question. There should be a preference to use brownfield land, buildings and less productive land instead of high-grade agricultural land.

It was also clear from the talks that there was a belief that National Landscapes, previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, were not seen as suitable locations for solar energy generation.



The discussion also looked at what is meant by landscape sensitivity – which is the combination of its value and its susceptibility.

Landscape value is inherent and may be influenced by whether it has any designations, such as National Landscapes. Susceptibility is how much the landscape might be affected by a development. Topography, scale, skylines and size are all elements which affect the suitability of a site.

Parts of Hertfordshire can be seen as topographically complex, and so it was important to take a long-term view of these areas. For example, there are many old oaks in the county, so planting new oaks as part of new renewable energy projects would improve the landscape character in the long-term.

There was a fear expressed that, while solar farms in rural areas are usually granted temporary planning permission, perhaps for 30 or 40 years, questions remained about whether the land would revert to its original purpose after that time.

Another key point was that infrastructure tends to have a cumulative effect, where sites with existing installations may attract more to the same area, as the new proposals are seen as less harmful than if they were located elsewhere. Our speaker Michelle encouraged people to consider this cumulative impact and whether it should be concentrated or shared across the landscape.

It is important to note that the amount of energy required cannot be efficiently generated from rooftops and brownfield land.



## Please consider:

How can we combat climate change and promote national energy security in a way which accommodates other necessary land uses and respects local landscapes?

Thinking about projects you know of nearby, how do you think the site has been chosen? Was it that, when all things were considered, the site was the most appropriate, or was a proposal pursued regardless of the site’s suitability?

What trade-offs exist in deploying renewable energy on brownfield or rooftop only?

Agricultural land is formally graded, with Grade 1 (the most productive) to Grade 3a being classed as BMV – best and most versatile. How important is agricultural land classification in this debate?





# OUR SPEAKERS ON: FOOD SECURITY

Our food security speakers discussed:

- A definition of the phrase ‘Food security’.
- The impact of competing demands for agricultural land.
- Whether we can be smarter about multi-functional land use.

Food security was defined by our speaker Prof. David Barling as a point where:

“  
*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.*  
”

This shows that food security is much more complicated than simply assuming all farmland produces food.

The discussion covered our recent history of food security, and how it could be maintained and enhanced alongside competing demands for our finite land.

After the Second World War there was a drive to produce as much food as possible in the UK, and the NFU’s Rob Wise said that by 1984, UK food self-sufficiency levels stood at 78% which was the highest they have ever been.

It must be remembered that food self-sufficiency is not the same as food security. The government judges the UK to be ‘broadly food secure’ because of the stability of global supplies.

Prof. Barling reviewed the 2023 national food security audit which found that:

- 62% of all the food consumed in the UK was produced in the UK.
- We produce 16% of the fruit we eat, and 53% of the vegetables.
- UK production levels are impacted by extreme weather, resulting in lower yields if the planting area is affected.

It was also noted that climate change meant 2024 had seen the worst harvests in the UK since 1982.

The discussion came round to farm profitability, and it was noted that most farms today were making a loss. We have a food system which prioritises consumer choice and low prices, but doesn’t account for the true cost of farming.

At the same time, the NFU is aiming for farming to be net zero by 2040. But while renewable energy production is a core part of this plan, it could not overtake food production.

In the UK, 70% of land is agricultural and of that, 70% is grassland.

Much of that land not used for our food: it is for example energy crops, forage for horses, or barley for whisky.

Renewable energy production would only ever take up 0.5% of the country’s farmed land to meet our net zero target. It is therefore a negligible risk to food security.



The discussion also covered different types of renewable technology and whether they could co-exist with traditional agriculture. It was felt that wind turbines can be seen as an efficient multi-functional land use because it is relatively easy to farm alongside the infrastructure.

Similarly, in Europe, designs are coming forward which allow agriculture to continue alongside solar panels, with the panels raised up on an angle and in rows wide enough apart to allow machinery between them.

## Please consider:

How can we make best use of our land, and what trade-offs would that require?

How can we best balance the need for food security alongside energy production and other competing land uses – can we have both food production and energy production using the same space?

Food production is being impacted by climate change. What can we do to help mitigate against this?





# OUR SPEAKERS ON: COMMUNITY

Our community speakers discussed how local people can discussed how local people can:

- Be affected by proposals for renewable energy in their area.
- Be involved in discussions about the plans.
- Benefit from the development in the long-term.

We heard how a family of tenant farmers were surprised to learn about proposals to use their land before their landlord had even approached them. The absence of communication between the developer, landowner and tenant had led to a lack of trust and transparency, resulting in conflicting interests.

Emma Sturdy said she felt tenant farmers like her should be able to benefit from the transition to renewable energy in the form of compensation. Then they would be able to maintain their farming businesses and decrease the impact of solar on their land.

Another consequence of that project, she believes, is that local people in her area who had wanted

to see more renewable energy in the form of wind and solar were now less likely to see it as desirable.

All our speakers agreed that community engagement was very important when renewable energy projects were being considered.

Neil Lindsay said that:

“  
*Those people who were most likely to be affected by new projects should be identified to make sure they were able to take part in early discussions.*

Emma Fletcher said the true opinions of the community could also be heard in social settings rather than in more formal settings.

She also said that, in her experience working on a 100% renewable community heat network:

“  
*Collaboration between the community and landowners helped to develop the infrastructure on low-grade agricultural land and disused farm buildings.*



The community heat network also saw other benefits such as a wildlife conservation site in the fields used for ground-source heat boreholes. A small solar farm, with associated battery energy storage, was designed to respond to the agricultural landscape and to have a low visual impact.

Everyone also agreed that great efforts should be made to make sure young people were involved in the discussions.

## Please consider:

How we can reach younger generations, so they understand the full picture on renewables, and can take a full part in consultation and engagement?

How we can best identify which communities should be part of the conversations, and identify who is likely to be most impacted by the development of renewable energy projects?

Are communities which are more involved in the planning process more likely to welcome the development of renewable energy proposals?



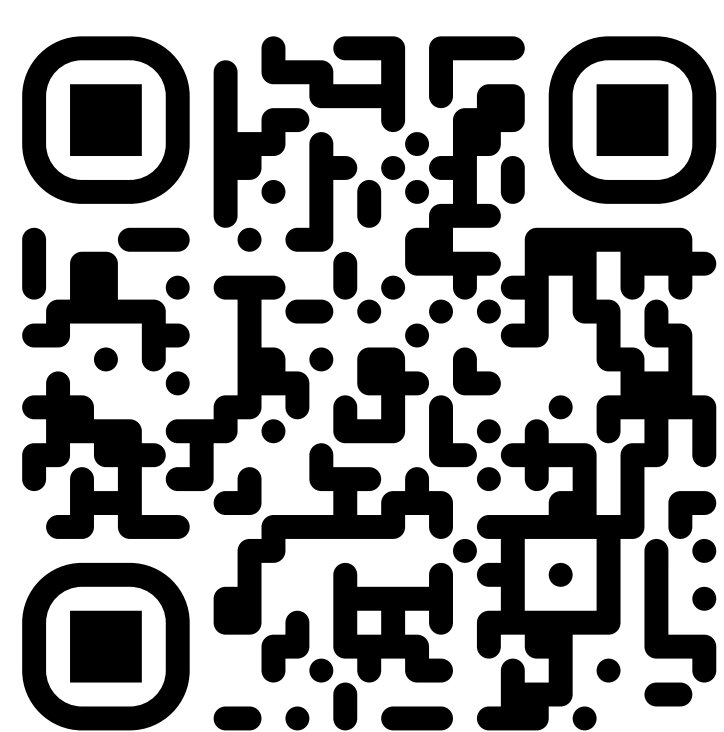


# YOUR FEEDBACK AND NEXT STEPS

Thank you for coming along today and taking part in this charrette on renewable energy in the Hertfordshire landscape.

We are grateful for your time in considering this important matter, and for your input.

All the information on display here today is also available on our website at [www.gascoyne.org/charrette](http://www.gascoyne.org/charrette) which you can also find with this QR code:



You are welcome to share this with friends, family and neighbours who you think may also be interested in learning more and joining in the conversation.

Please make sure that if you have any questions or observations, you have shared them with members of the team here today, so that they can be noted and be taken into consideration. Printed feedback forms are available.

Alternatively, you may be more comfortable offering your feedback online. You can do this via an online feedback form available at the link above, or by scanning the QR code.

Over the coming week, we will be reflecting on all the issues raised and considering both the opportunities and constraints on our land.

Potential opportunities will need to be assessed, based on the suitability of the land and the potential interest of a developer.

We will return here next week for a follow-up event where we will be able to share the feedback we have received today and to discuss its findings.

We do hope you will be able to join us then – on **Tuesday 30th September 2025, from 4pm to 9pm.**

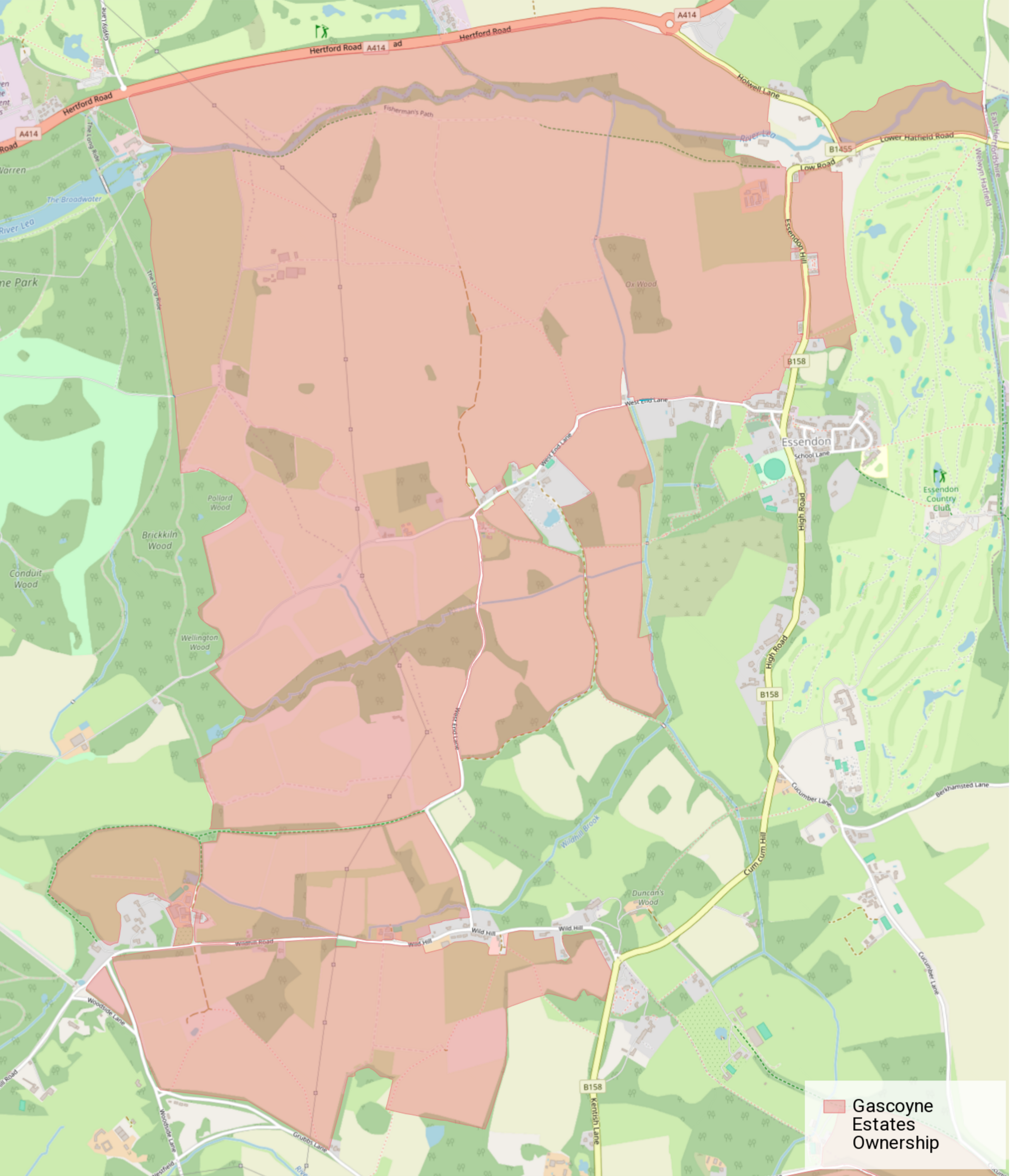
Following next week’s charrette, we will also be producing a post-charrette paper which we will publish on the above website.

If you would like to be notified about this and other matters relating to this charrette, please make sure you have left your email address. We will only use it for this purpose.





# LAND AT ESSENDON / HILL END

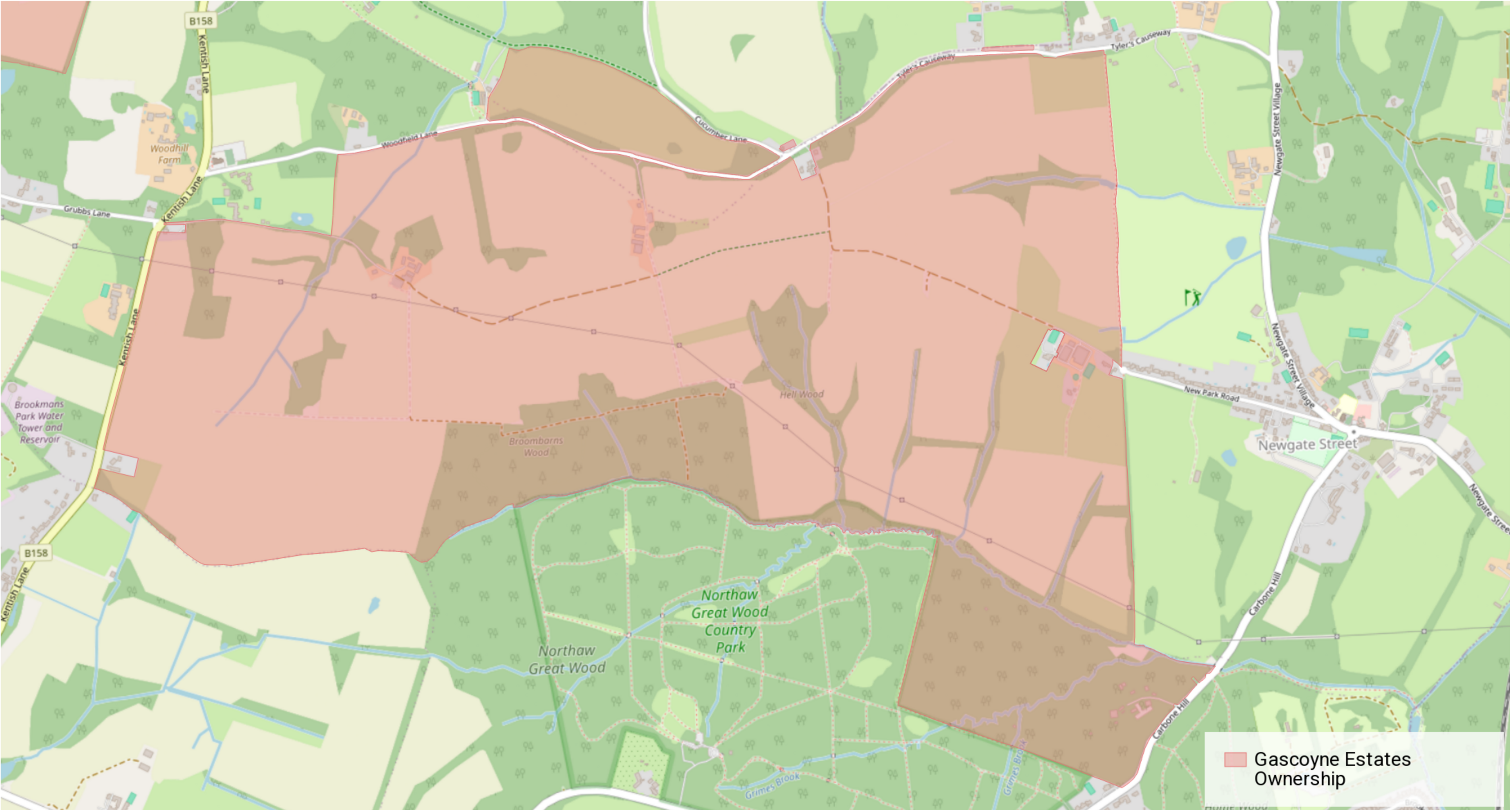


500 m  
Scale 1:19000 (at A4)





# LAND AT NEWGATE STREET





# LAND AT SOUTH MIMMS / POTTERS BAR

