2025 – Support continues to grow for solar

A study of public attitudes to solar development

Foreword

Chris Hewett,
Chief Executive

Solar Energy UK

The growth of the solar energy sector continues to accelerate. Well over 3 GW is expected to be deployed this year, rising from 20.2 GW at the end of 2024. This is a trend that Labour is keen to sustain, as we reach towards almost 60 GW by the end of the decade.

So it is gratifying to know that public support is increasing. This report confirms that backing for solar farms is greatest among those living near them, which suggests that developers' public engagement efforts are effective. There is also strong support for prioritising solar in national planning decisions.

Nevertheless, communication challenges remain, not least ensuring that the public are aware of why locations for solar farms are selected and the benefits they can bring for nature. Our efforts must be redoubled.

Sam Cranston,
Director of Energy Infrastructure

Copper Consultancy

For solar to play the role it must in achieving net zero by 2050, it's key we understand public perceptions.

This report is a continuation of work undertaken in 2022 and 2023. It shows growing support for solar and tracks trends in what matters to people when considering solar development proposals.

With a new government committed to solar power, enshrined in its "clean power by 2030" mission, more projects will be coming forward across the UK. How communities receive plans for new solar farms will be critical to smooth project delivery.

The whole country has a part to play in realising the ambition to triple solar power by 2030, and this report focuses on issues the energy industry must consider if positive public sentiment for solar is to be maintained.

Introduction

The solar industry has grown in the UK since we last reported in 2023, a trend the new government is keen to continue. Nearly 3 GW of nationally significant solar projects have been approved by the new Labour administration – three times more than the last 15 years.

Our data show that support for solar has gone up among respondents who self-select as living near a solar farm. This could point to the positive work developers are doing to engage with the public throughout the development cycle.

While this is a strong foundation to build on, meeting the government's intention to reach almost 60GW of capacity by 2030 remains challenging. A significant number of projects will be required and developers will have to continue harnessing public support in a sector with rapidly evolving technologies.

Successfully communicating the potential benefits of a solar scheme has never been more crucial for the energy industry.

Sentiment towards solar energy remains positive

- General attitudes towards solar energy development are positive: **77%** of respondents support the development of solar energy in their local area, while **55%** say they have become more supportive of solar energy.
- More than **50%** of respondents agreed with the statement: "Given the need to hit our net zero targets, solar energy should be prioritised in national planning decisions."
- A large majority of respondents strongly believe that the local economy and community should benefit from solar farm development in that area, for example, by creating local jobs, skills and supply chain opportunities, or by feeding benefits back into the local community.

Support for prioritising solar energy within national planning

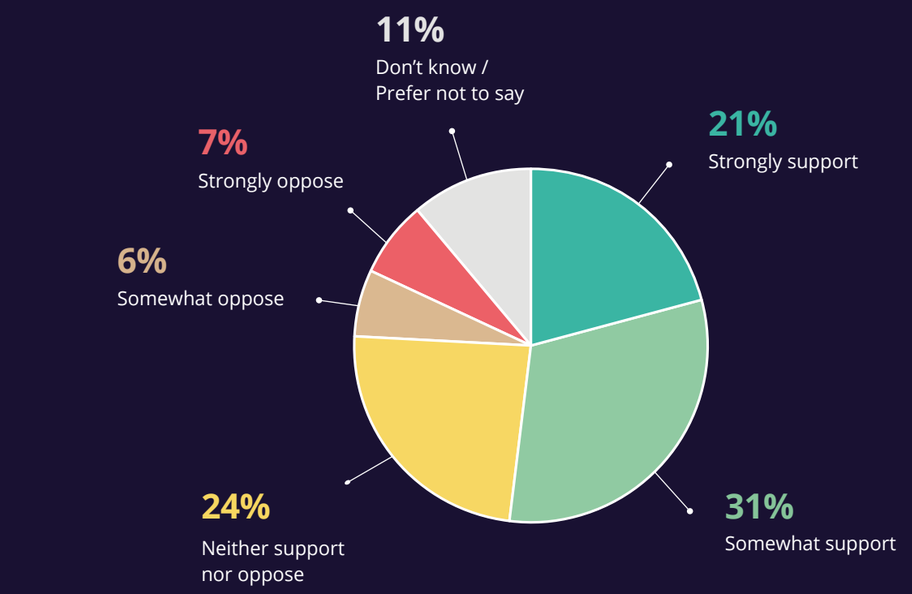
A clear majority of respondents feel that solar energy should be prioritised in national planning to meet the UK's net zero targets.

About the research

BMG Research conducted an online poll of 1,562 adults in Great Britain on 2–3 October 2024. The results are weighted to reflect the profile of adults in Great Britain. BMG Research is a member of the British Polling Council (BPC) and abides by its rules.

To what extent do you support or oppose the following statement?

"Given the need to hit our net zero targets, solar energy should be prioritised in national planning."

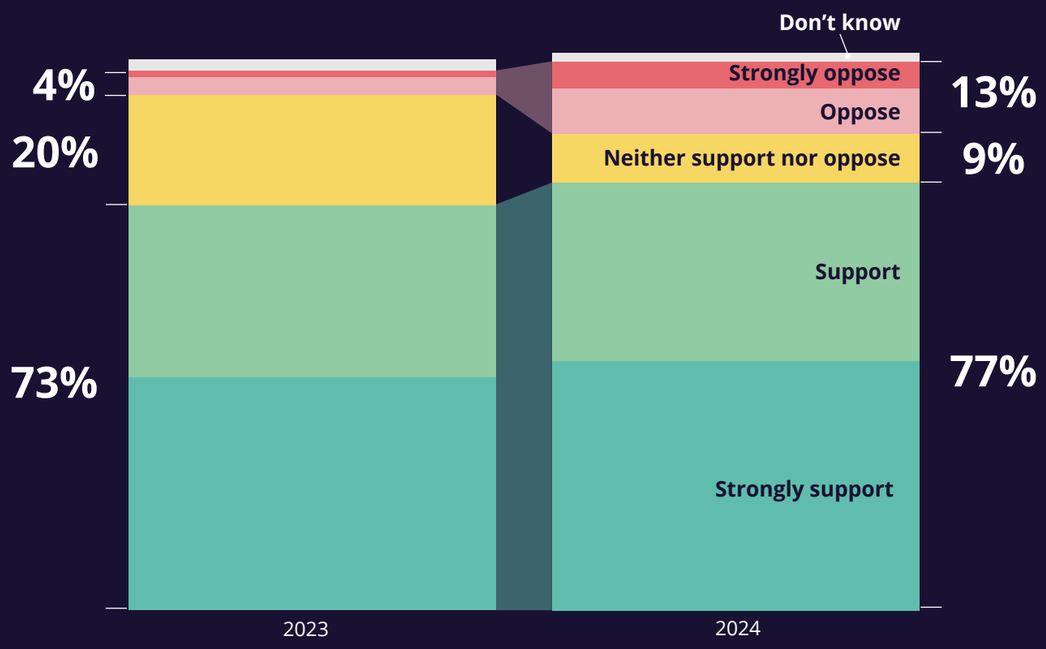


A clearer position on solar farms is emerging from respondents between 2023 and 2024

Even with a growing number of projects launching across the country, public support for solar energy is growing with a **4% increase since 2023**. As the number of solar projects increases, so does the determined position of communities around the country.
In 2024, fewer respondents "neither support nor oppose" or "don't know" compared with the previous survey. In addition to an increase in people supporting solar energy, there is also an increase in those opposing it, which suggests that more work is needed to communicate the benefits.

To what extent do you support or oppose the following statement?

"I am in favour of the development of solar energy in my local area."

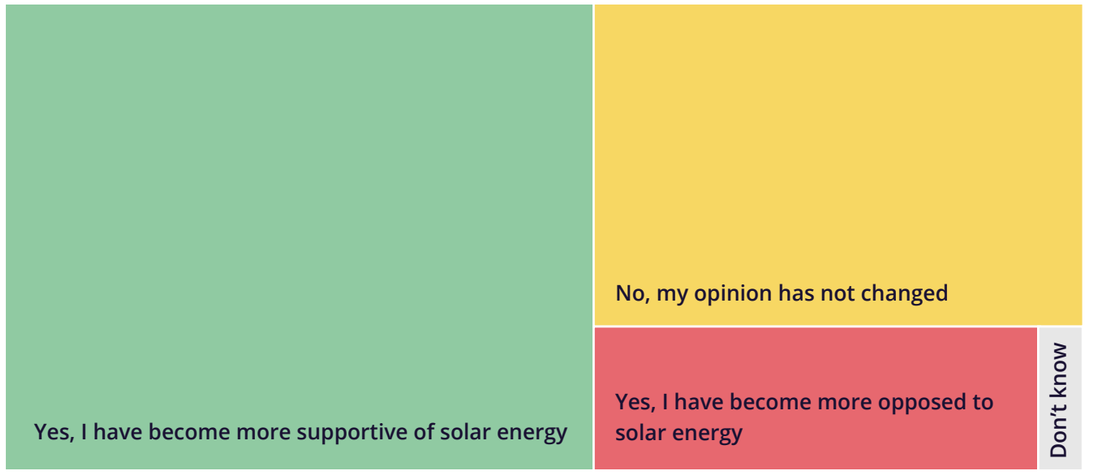


There has been a positive shift in sentiment towards solar energy

68%
of respondents have changed their attitudes towards solar energy in the past year:

55%
have become more supportive

compared to only
13%
becoming more opposed

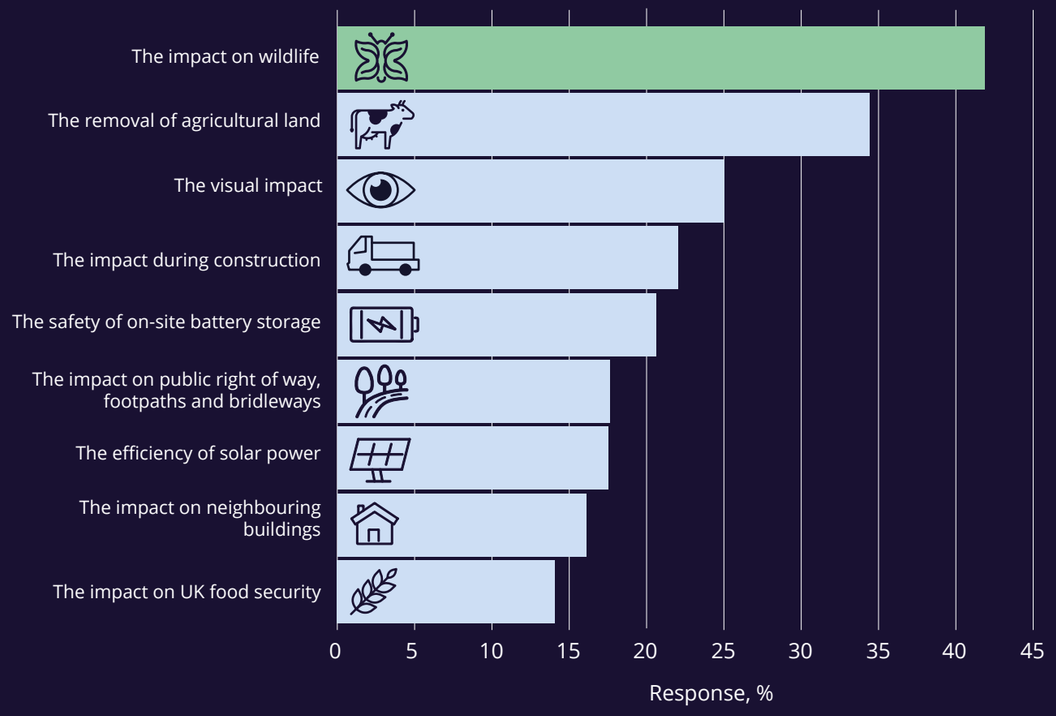


Public perception of the most significant drawbacks remains the same

In 2024, **42%** of respondents perceived **"the impact on local wildlife"** as the most important impact of solar farms,

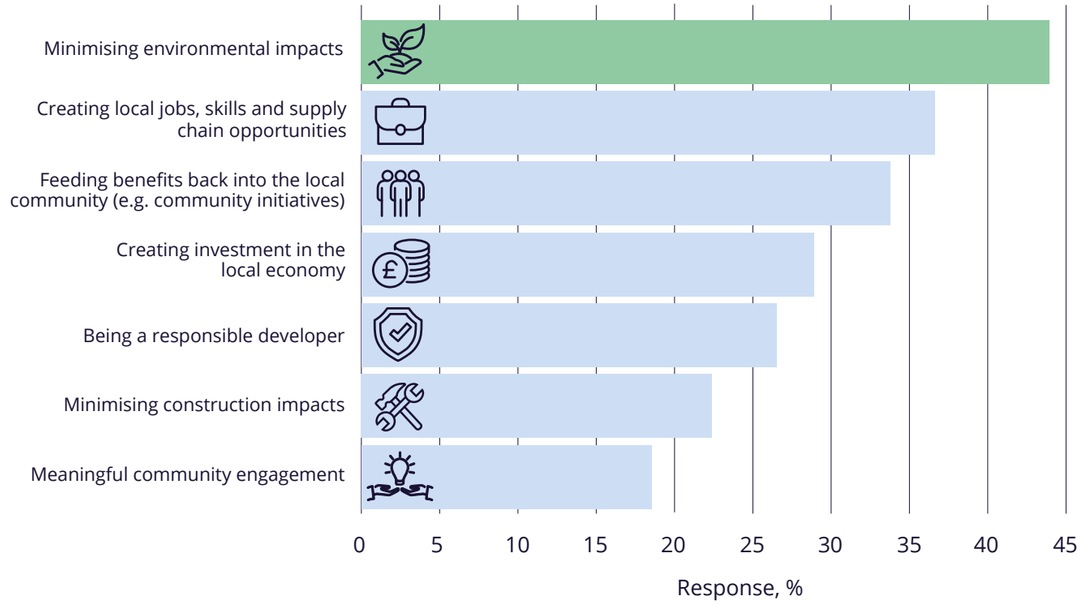
compared with only **27.5% in 2023**

What would you consider to be the key drawbacks of solar farms?



"Minimising environmental impacts" when developing a solar farm remains the most important issue concerning the public in 2023 and 2024, despite clear evidence that well-designed and well-managed solar farms can support local biodiversity and environmental preservation.

What issues do you consider most important when developing a solar farm?

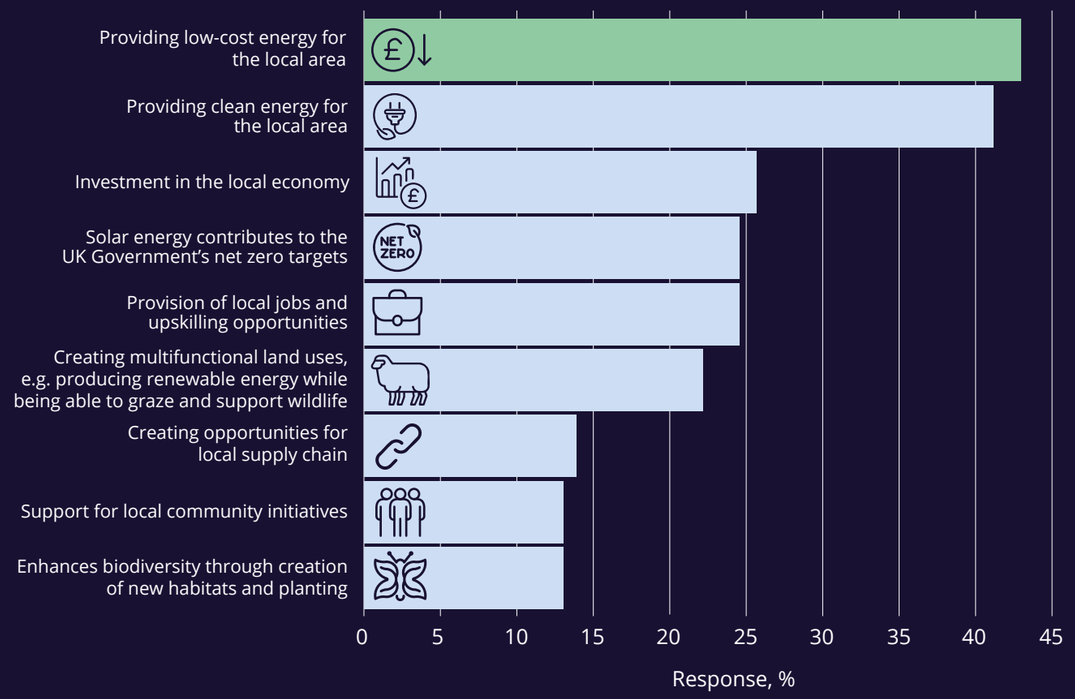


Public perception of the key benefits remains unchanged

More people, **43% up from 32% in 2023,**
consider **"providing low-cost energy for the local area"** a key benefit of solar energy

This sits alongside **41%** who consider **"providing clean energy to the local area"** another key benefit.*

What would you consider to be the key benefits of solar energy in your local area?



Note that low-cost energy and clean energy are split into two separate questions in 2024; they were combined as one in 2023.

Understanding biodiversity net gain

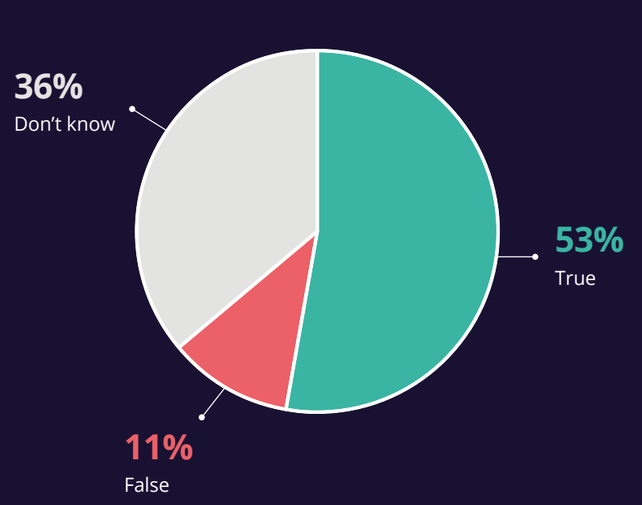
In 2023, **42%** of respondents were not aware that solar farms could increase biodiversity.

This year, that number fell to just **11%**.

This highlights a significant improvement in how biodiversity net gain on solar projects is being communicated and a greater awareness of its benefits among local communities.

To what extent do you support or oppose the following statement?

Through careful site selection and planning, solar farms can deliver a net gain in biodiversity on a site."



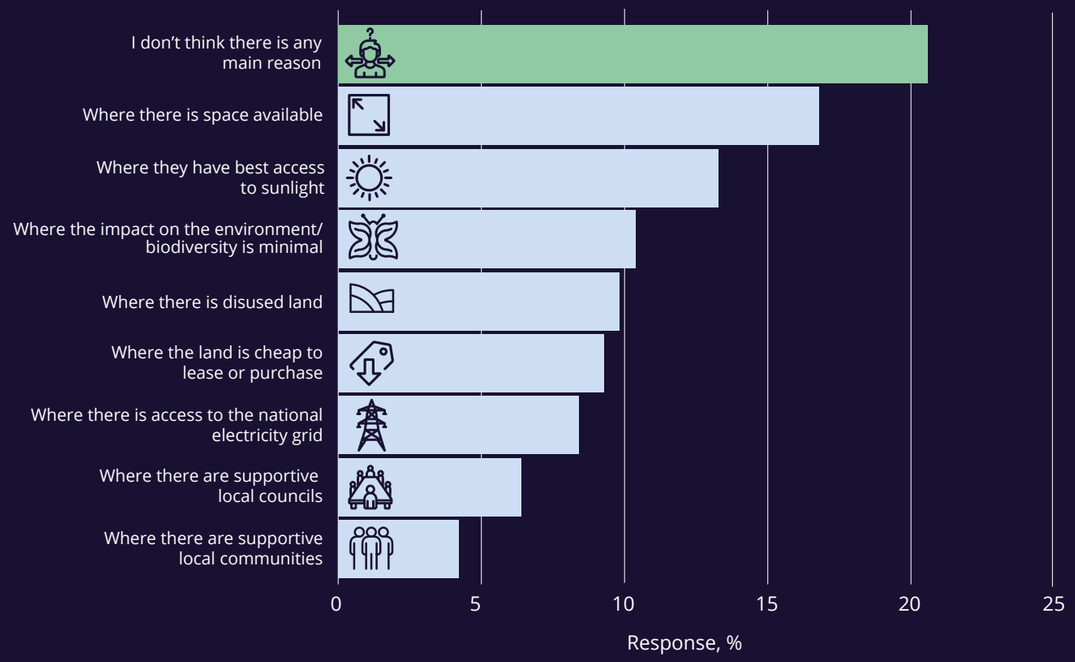
Site selection and cumulative impact

In 2023, **34.5%** of respondents thought that there was no main reason why developers selected prospective sites for solar farms.

In 2024, that percentage has shrunk to **20.3%**

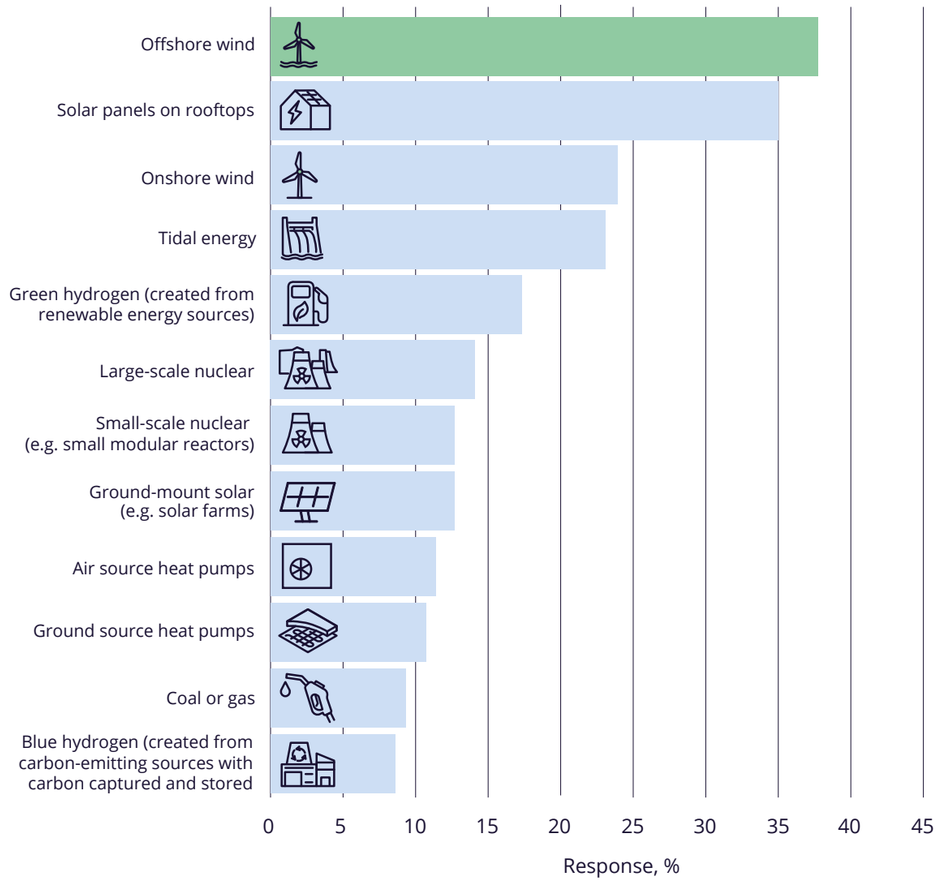
However, **only 10%** of respondents in 2024 understood that the primary reason for site selection is based on access to the national grid. Limited public awareness of the reasons behind site selection remains a challenge.

What do you think is the main reason prospective sites for solar farms are chosen by developers in the UK?



Outside of offshore wind, respondents continue to view solar on rooftops as a priority

Which of the following energy sources, if any, do you think the government should prioritise to deliver net zero energy generation?



Conclusions and recommendations

While there is considerable support for solar power, developers must continue to consider, and challenge, perceived impacts on environmental factors.

Individuals continue to express a strong desire to see increased adoption of rooftop solar within their communities and perceive the use of land for multiple purposes as a noteworthy benefit of solar energy.

The public's aspirations extend beyond the mere development of solar power: they also anticipate associated employment and skills opportunities, and the emergence of a robust supply chain.

Public attitudes to the key benefits and drawbacks of solar energy continue to be diverse. Yet, there remains clear support for the need to prioritise solar energy within the UK's energy transition targets.

What next?

Here are our recommendations for the industry as we aim towards delivering almost 60 GW by 2030.

Adapt and learn from previous experiences, particularly when it comes to minimising the environmental impacts of projects.

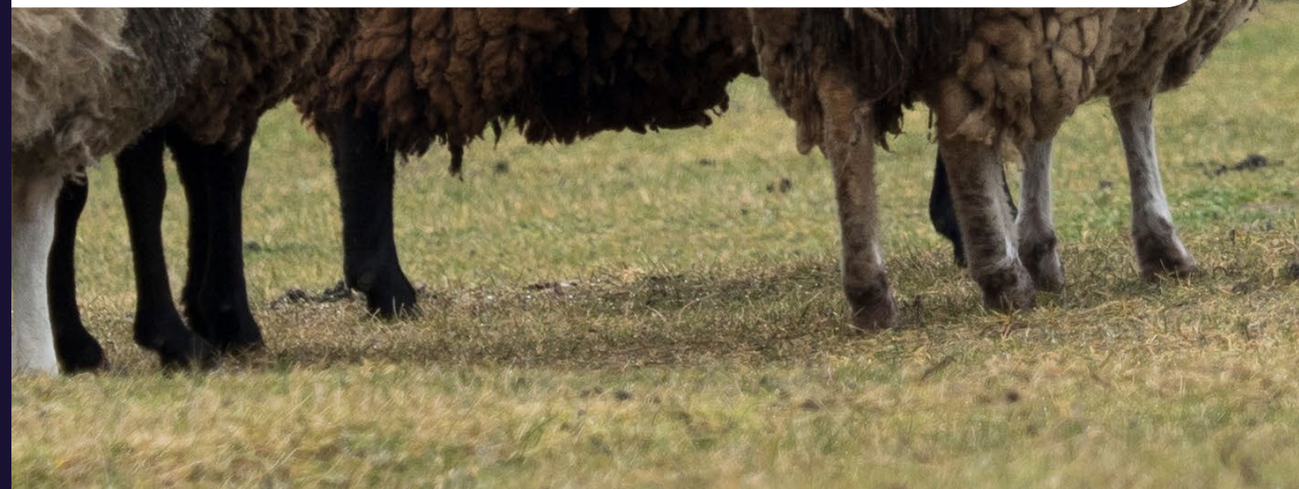
Explain the benefits of solar better and dispel the myths surrounding large-scale solar projects.

Communicate solar as a solution to individual challenges (e.g. energy bills) and regional issues (e.g. local authority net zero targets, jobs and skills).

Collaborate with local communities and local authorities to maximise the cumulative benefits of large-scale solar while minimising the cumulative impacts.

Encourage a more optimistic perception of solar, both regionally and for local communities, as the increase in the number of proposed projects mean that more and more people will be directly affected by new developments.

Keep working with the government and opposition parties to make planning a smoother process for developers, communities and decision-makers.



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