

Answers to Examiners' Written Questions 2 for Deadline 4

Question ExQ2.13.8

This is a particularly difficult question to answer.

Forever Fields is a creative attempt to show what is at risk from this proposed overdevelopment and industrialisation of greenbelt, and to celebrate the natural environment we currently live in. We captured how it looks today using photography, painting, sculptures, video, pottery and poetry as a permanent record.

We believe that in order to restore the fields and landscape in 42 years time the developer and landowner must be clear at the beginning what they need to do, what approach will be taken and what funds need to be put aside to ensure it is completed. Without this clarity and commitment the development cannot seriously be considered temporary.

However, if the developer in the meantime plans to install 3m high hedges to screen the development across thousands of acres of fields, and leave them in place at the end of the period, the local landscape will never be the same again. It will be changed forever.

We were not surprised therefore when we asked the Forever Fields artists question ExQ2.13.8 that we received a mixed response that was almost equally in favour and against 3m high hedges. After all, what is worse? An industrial eyesore for 42 years or gigantic hedges that block views forever?

What would help this discussion is a more proactive stance by the developer towards answering key questions. The developer has not responded to the challenges that Forever Fields has presented at the Exhibition and in the Forever Fields book. Neither has the developer answered specific questions raised by Forever Fields at Hearing One, 13th May 2025.

In summary, in order to consider question ExQ2.13.8 properly, the developer needs to address the above and provide more information as follows:

1. A detailed plan and photomontages that illustrate the impact of the proposal on the landscape and views, including hedges across the whole scheme.
2. Clarity about how the land will be managed during the lifetime of the project if it is given approval.
3. A detailed and fully costed plan for reinstatement of the land and removal of the solar panels at the end of the 42 year term.

Finally, we have attached some of the feedback to the question ExQ2.13.8 from artists to provide additional context and questions, we could have added much more, but some of the artists have submitted individual responses as interested parties and others repeat some of the comments below:

Sample Comments from artists ...

- Yes - Hedges should be mixed native species typical of the area. Please ensure that the hedges are properly maintained during the life of the solar installation and that they leave at least a 2m wide strip for any footpath egress. Ideally some additional buffer area behind the hedge should be added too.
- Yes - they shouldn't be 3 metres tall. 2 metres would be enough to mask the view at eye level and you could look up over them and at least at some points see the horizon. This could possibly increase maintenance requirements - is that a good or bad thing?

- Yes - Hedges can always be cut back, if necessary (if they get too high).
- Yes - Given my own experience of hedge maintenance, there would need to be cast iron guarantees that the hedges would be maintained regardless of cost, otherwise the footpaths would become impassable. I believe that the maintenance cost would be staggering - and the developer or subsequent owner would need or be responsible for these. There might need to be intermittent short gaps in the hedges where possible views-through might be acceptable if solar panels were found not to be detracting from views, in certain places.
- No - If the hedges are going to create tunnels which not only obscure the view of the panels but also what remains of any view of the surrounding countryside, as shown in your examples, then my answer would be NO.
- It is not a simple answer - are they going to do anything else with the fields – there seem to be so many solar projects on the continent where agriculture projects are incorporated within the solar farms?
- Yes - This is tricky, because the question is would I prefer to walk the footpaths & have a view of a hedge a couple of feet from my face, which I couldn't see over, or have a view of solar panels desecrating the landscape in every direction. On balance the former, though of course I would rather not have the solar panels at all. If we say we don't want the hedges, we would be letting off PVDP from a major obligation to shield us from the visual impact & I would imagine they would be overjoyed. So I don't want that. I am not so bothered about the situation in 40+ years!
- It is not a simple answer - This seems like a 'catch-them-out' email. If I reply 'yes' I am tacitly agreeing to the solar farm. Thank you anyway but I do think 'they' are devious
- Yes - Partly because at least some wild space will be available for transient wildlife. A wildlife corridor, albeit it narrow. Maybe mini ecosystems . Added inconvenience and cost for developers, might make them think twice. I ask would they plant a variety of hedging plants to maintain a wider variety of plant life that will support a diversity of creatures and improve the soil etc. (should be included in the plan). However, Hedges put it all out of sight and therefore out of mind and by hiding the land of solar panels and the equipment ploughing up and destroying the land to access the sites is a concern as it is as if we have accepted it. By seeing the destruction, protests might continue, it will still being talked about and perhaps will be a warning to future developments. As the panels deteriorate over time regular walkers can monitor and challenge developments. There is the dilemma . Hide the evidence or try to hide it. What else can they get away with if it is hidden?
- Yes - Whilst I understand that hedges will obscure views, who wants to look at fields of solar panels? I like hedges, and they are great habitat for insects and birds. So YES. I vote for hedges.
- No - It would be like walking through a tunnel and would change the nature of the landscape forever, Also who will maintain these trees, both when they are young and once they have become established. That will necessitate a lot of work with machines.
- Yes - But sadly I feel a lot of people responding with 'yes' will amount to the removal of a grievance, i.e. the unsightly views, and this will give more impetus to the proposal.
- It is not a simple answer - For me, the sweeping views are what is valuable and that I want to keep for the current as well as future generation. The view gives a hard to describe sense of wellbeing so I simply don't want the installation of solar panels to go on areas where we have these sweeping views. Hedges are great for wildlife but if grown to 3m will obstruct all views so are not ideal either. I can't answer this with a simple yes or no.
- What happens as technology changes the solutions to solar power collection. If the hedges are planted they will be fixed, but could end up screening solar panels that aren't there anymore - a permanent change to a 'temporary' problem.