Green Hill Solar Farm
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Consultation Report Appendix: Non-statutory Consultation Summary Report

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Workshop Summary Report
September 2024

GREEN HILL
SOLAR FARM

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Introduction

Island Green Power (IGP) is bringing forward proposed plans for a solar farm and battery storage on land located to the west and south of Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, and north of Milton Keynes.

If approved, Green Hill Solar Farm (GHSF) would generate a power output of up to 500 megawatts (MW), enough to power approximately 115,000 households annually. The energy storage element of the scheme will help store surplus renewable generation and supply it to the national grid when needed.

As the proposed generation capacity exceeds 50 MW, the project is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).

The proposals for the project are at an early stage. In March and May 2024, we held a series of workshops with local councillors and community organisations to gather knowledge to help us better understand the local context, key constraints and what is important to the local community.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the workshops, including the information presented and discussed. It also outlines the key themes from the comments received and explains how this feedback will be incorporated into our project design process.

This report has been sent to key stakeholders and those invited to the workshops and has been made publicly available to demonstrate our ongoing work ahead of the statutory consultation, scheduled to take place this winter.

This engagement has helped us to refine the early-stage design proposals for GHSF ahead of presenting more detailed designs during our statutory consultation this winter.

Green Hill Solar Farm

Green Hill Solar Farm (GHSF) has the potential to generate up to 500 MW of electricity, making it a significant source of clean energy for the country and contributing to the government's net-zero targets.

The GHSF project proposals also include a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), which will store surplus renewable energy and release it to the national grid when needed. The proposed site for GHSF is located on land to the west and south of Wellingborough, Northampton, and to the north of Milton Keynes.

The applicant for GHSF will be Green Hill Solar Farm Limited, a subsidiary of Island Green Power (IGP).

IGP is a leading developer of renewable energy projects, with a focus on utility-scale solar farms and battery energy storage. Our mission is to help the UK increase our solar energy use, making more renewable energy possible while drastically reducing our carbon emissions.

Approach to consultation

Due to GHSF's potential to generate over 50 MW of energy, it is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).

The planning process for NSIPs is governed by the Planning Act 2008 and requires the project to apply for a Development Consent Order (DCO). The GHSF DCO application will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), the independent body responsible for administering the DCO process. PINS will then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on whether to approve the DCO. The Secretary of State makes the final decision on the DCO application.

To date, we have conducted early consultations with key stakeholders who have expert knowledge of the local area. This engagement has helped us understand potential concerns and opportunities at the site. Our early efforts included a series of workshops, communication with landowners and nearby properties, and discussions with statutory bodies.

This engagement is essential for the preparation and refinement of our detailed proposals, which we will present during the statutory consultation scheduled for this winter. Following this consultation, we will prepare to submit our Development Consent Order (DCO) application, expected in Spring 2025.

Early consultation workshops (March and May 2024)

Introduction

As part of our early engagement for GHSF, we held five workshops with different stakeholder groups. Those invited included political representatives, local community groups and technical specialists.

These workshops were held as follows:

- **Monday 4 March 2024, from 14:30 until 17:30 at Mears Ashby Village Hall, Northampton**
- **Tuesday 5 March 2024, from 10:00 until 13:00 at Mears Ashby Village Hall, Northampton**
- **Tuesday 5 March 2024, from 14:30 until 17:30 at Mears Ashby Village Hall, Northampton**
- **Friday 15 March 2024, from 10:00 until 13:00 at Mears Ashby Village Hall, Northampton**
- **Thursday 30 May 2024, from 10:00 until 14:00 at Turvey Village Hall, Bedford.**

Each session included an introductory presentation, followed by a question-and-answer session, and an interactive 'master-planning' session, where attendees could work with the project team to directly mark feedback on the draft site maps. This format provided an opportunity for attendees to actively participate in the early-stage design development process.

The workshops aimed to introduce preliminary plans for GHSF, covering the need for solar, surveys carried out so far, the timeline and the next stages for the project – providing the attendees with an opportunity to ask questions and raise any concerns with the relevant project team members, as well as share feedback and suggestions.

Several members of the project team, including IGP and several technical specialists, attended the workshops to explain the project and the work carried out to date, and use their technical knowledge to address any questions and inform feedback. This included experts in relation to planning, landscape and visual design consultation and engagement.

Workshop attendees:

Workshop attendees included:

- relevant ward councillors across North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire
- wider council representatives such as technical planning officers
- representatives of the local community, including parish councils (from North and West Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes) and local interest and community groups
- statutory consultees and wider environmental and technical stakeholders.

Members of the project team were in attendance to present GHSF. The team consisted of:

- Island Green Power (IGP) – The developer
- Lanpro – Planning, landscape and heritage consultants
- Clarkson and Woods – Ecological consultants
- Copper Consultancy – Communications consultants
- KMC Transport Planning – Transport consultants
- Mabbett Planning – Flood risk and drainage consultants.

Information presented

The table below provides a summary of the information presented at the workshops.

Information presented	
Green Hill Solar Farm - early proposals	We provided an introduction to the project and the developer behind the proposals. The applicant for GHSF will be Green Hill Solar Farm Limited, a subsidiary of IGP. In March 2024, we presented the site area as approximately 950* hectares (excluding the cable route search area). The sites are located within the administrative boundaries of West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council across seven separate sites which have been named A, B, C, D, E, F and BESS (in reference to the site map). In May 2024, additional land to the north-east of Warrington in Milton Keynes was included in the site. Therefore, a fifth workshop was held to present the new land, named 'G' in reference to the site map, and updated the site area to 1,119 hectares (excluding the cable route search area) across eight separate sites. The workshop in May was conducted in the same format as the workshop in March.
About IGP	Attendees were given an introduction to IGP, a leading developer of renewable energy projects, with a focus on utility-scale solar farms and battery storage systems. Our mission is to help the UK increase our solar energy generation, making more renewable energy possible and drastically reducing our carbon emissions. We are committed to providing opportunities for landscape and ecological enhancement, biodiversity net gain, public access improvements and wider socioeconomic benefits, including employment opportunities and a community benefit fund.

*In June 2024, after the early consultation workshops, we included land near Site A, referred to as Site A.2, in our proposal for solar development, increasing the site area to 1,200 acres. This land is not referenced in this report but will be available for comment during the statutory consultation, scheduled to take place this winter.

The need for solar	An overview of the needs case for the project, along with UK net zero targets, was provided. The government has set net zero and energy security targets to decarbonise by 2050 under the Climate Change Act and is supportive of solar that is co-located with battery energy storage to maximise the efficiency of land use. The development of GHSF provides an opportunity to contribute towards the national target
Overview of GHSF and the work undertaken to date	Attendees heard about the project, its location and our initial work carried out to date, including an initial identification of local constraints and opportunities to inform the design. Initial assessments are being conducted, including desk-based assessments, constraint mapping, on-site surveys and cable route optioneering. Assessments include: • ecology and arboriculture • heritage • landscape • transport • Other – agriculture and land classification, glint and glare, etc.
Technical updates	
Site selection	We shared an update on the assessments undertaken by the team to identify suitable locations for GHSF, following an agreement with National Grid to import/export a 500 MW connection at Grendon Substation.
Ecology and biodiversity	An overview of initial environmental constraints and opportunities, identified by the team through early desk-based research, included: • consideration of environmental features and constraints, such as the River Nene, ancient woodlands and other off-site designated sites of ecological importance • on-site habitats and wildlife • potential for ecological enhancements such as habitat creation.
Cultural heritage	We provided an overview of the surveys conducted by the team to provide insight into local heritage and identification of conservation areas, including listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, and registered parks and gardens.
Landscape and visual impact	We shared an overview of the assessments undertaken to date to understand the landscape and visual constraints and opportunities to help inform project design. The opportunities included: • enhancing green infrastructure such as reinforcing hedgerows and connecting existing woodlands • enhancing local public rights of way.
Transport and access	Attendees were provided with an overview of the ongoing traffic and access assessments, including a review of field access for construction vehicles and route options to GHSF access points. These assessments will be important in determining the preferred access points and routes for the project and will inform the Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan, submitted as part of our final DCO application.
Water environment	Attendees were provided with an update on the initial assessments to understand constraints such as the River Nene and flood zones. The constraints identified, and ongoing assessments, will be considered in the ongoing master-planning process for the project.
Socio-economic and land use	An overview of the process to determine the agricultural land classification of the site, given that most of the site is in agricultural use, was shared. Other socio-economic factors which will be considered in the application (such as impacts on employment, local businesses and amenities, land use and access to public rights of way) were also identified.
Community benefits	Attendees heard about our commitment to working with local community groups to bring forward benefits to communities closest to the sites. The benefits on-site will be considered once outcomes of

	ongoing assessments are available. These benefits could be, for example, environmental enhancements or achieving biodiversity net gain through additional planting and habitat creation.
Design principles	We made available a summary of the work undertaken to develop the 'design principles' that will underpin the design of GHSF. The feedback provided at the workshops and the outcome of ongoing assessments will be considered as part of the design process. The detailed design layout will be presented at the statutory consultation.
Interactive session	We invited attendees to assess the site maps that were presented at the workshop and provide their comments and insights that the project team should consider in the design of GHSF. We invited comments on the following: • ecology and biodiversity • cultural and heritage • landscape and visual Impact • transport and access • water environment • socio-economics, land use and community benefit • any other issues important to local people • community benefits.

Maps and plans

Several maps and plans were available at each workshop and subsequently published on the project website. Site G was published in May 2024 after the fifth workshop. The materials published on the website include:

- Environmental Masterplan sites – A0 maps of sites A-G including BESS with indicative boundaries
- Location Plan – presenting an overview of the site areas A-G including BESS
- Access and Location Plan – presenting the potential access points for the sites
- Environmental Constraints Plan North – environmental constraints and opportunities in the northern sites A-E
- Environmental Constraints Plan South – environmental constraints and opportunities in the southern sites F-G, including BESS.

All maps and plans can be found on our website at: **www.greenhillsolar.co.uk/#documents**.

Key feedback themes received

Attendees were encouraged to leave their feedback on the map via Post-it notes, feedback sheets and further comments on the printed maps.

The table below provides a summary of the key themes that were raised and how we are working to address comments. All comments, together with our ongoing engagement and design work, will help inform our more developed proposals presented during our statutory consultation this winter.

Key themes from the feedback	How we are working to address and incorporate feedback
Design Participants were concerned about the potential size of GHSF and suggested it should be reduced in size to minimise impact on the landscape. Further concerns were raised on the use of agricultural land, and whether the land can continue to be used for agricultural purposes; attendees suggested developing GHSF on brownfield land. The feedback also highlighted the concern on how the solar panels will be mounted, and the type of solar panels that will be used.	We understand the concern about the size of GHSF and its impact on local views. The current plans for GHSF are indicative and illustrate the maximum amount of land that could be incorporated into the final design. These designs will evolve to incorporate feedback, land surveys, ecological and archaeological assessments, and further consultations with landowners. This process ensures that the indicative site layout, including cable routes, will be revised to mitigate any potential negative impacts and enhance the landscape. As part of the site selection process for GHSF, we have assessed brownfield sites for their suitability for solar energy. This assessment will be included in the Site Selection Report, which will be submitted with the DCO application. Typically, brownfield land, especially in urban areas, is prioritised for housing developments due to its proximity to urban centres. The key factors determining the locations of solar farms are: • the National Grid's capacity in the area to connect to the electricity supply • a review of planning and environmental constraints within a radius of the grid connection point • finding willing landowners with enough suitable land to meet the National Grid capacity.

	The type of mounting structure for the solar panels is still being considered and will undergo further assessments. We are considering two options: tracker panels, which follow the sun's path during the day, and fixed panels, which would face south. Tracker panels typically reach a height of 4.5 metres (m) at their peak, but this height is only reached for a small portion of the day. Fixed panels typically have a height of 3.5 m. Over its lifetime, each solar panel will generate zero-carbon, zero-pollution electricity for decades, once the initial carbon emitted for its production is offset. A more detailed draft scheme plan, including indicative site layout, will be published in the Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). The PEIR will present the initial findings of the land grading assessments and their impact on the local environment. It will also detail the design of GHSF, including the location of the solar panels and associated infrastructure.
Ecology and biodiversity Participants highlighted local wildlife sites that are frequent locations for deer, badgers and sheep grazing. Participants raised concerns about the potential impact on local ecology and biodiversity, with specific reference to the movement of deer and the habitats of local wildlife such as water voles and otters.	Our ecology team is currently carrying out habitat and species surveys, which will allow us to better identify any potential biodiversity impacts of the scheme. These surveys include, but are not limited to, birds, bats, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, water vole and otter. Ground-mounted solar projects provide significant environmental benefits. In addition to providing renewable, low-carbon energy – which is good for the planet – they also improve biodiversity locally by creating new habitats for wildlife and letting plant life grow around the panels over time, compared to harvesting crops yearly. Solar farms have been proven to be able to deliver considerably higher levels of biodiversity net gain (BNG) compared to other types of development and our proposals for GHSF will be no different. GHSF will be designed to minimise the impact on ecological features through their retention and enhancements such as mitigation planting and landscaping where possible. New planting would support a diverse range of critical invertebrate species and encourage new species to colonise the site. There are potential further opportunities for habitat creation through the implementation of additional wildlife corridors and the installation of bat and bird nesting boxes, hibernacula, woodpiles and beehives within the site.

Landscape and visual Impact Comments highlighted the concern about the impact on the landscape and its overall character, including the project's visual impact. Suggestions from participants on how to enhance the local landscape included: • new planting with diverse and resilient species • screening of infrastructure such as BESS.	Our design process is landscape-led and seeks to take advantage of natural screening due to contours in the land and existing hedgerows and woodland. The landscape and visual impacts will be assessed from several key viewpoints agreed upon with officers at local planning authorities (LPA). A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) will form a part of the PEIR as it will also include the preliminary findings of the environmental assessments concerning the LVIA. The PEIR will also include a draft outline of the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan and will detail the measures that will be brought forward to mitigate the impact on landscape and biodiversity.
Heritage Participants highlighted the importance of local landmarks and historical sites such as the Church of St Mary in Grendon. Concerns raised included the impact on local landmarks such as listed churches as well as farms that are not listed but have been in the community for a long time.	As part of a cultural heritage assessment, surveys will also be undertaken for the scheme in consultation with Historic England and the councils' archaeologists and conservation officers. This will provide the information we need to assess if there are any impacts that can influence the design of GHSF and identify an appropriate mitigation strategy if required.
Noise Participants noted the high level of noise from existing BESS developments in Grendon and raised concerns there will be noise from the proposed BESS in GHSF.	Minimal noise will be emitted by the arrays. Similarly, the supporting electrical equipment emits only very low levels of noise. We are currently undertaking noise assessments for the solar farm and BESS facility, which will be used to inform our mitigation approach to reduce noise impacts at existing receptors. A noise report will also be submitted and will form part of the PEIR and will be shared at our statutory consultation, currently planned for this winter.
Glint and glare Participants noted the proximity of the development to Sywell Aerodrome and raised concern about the danger of glint and glare on landing and take-off of aeroplanes.	Solar panels are less reflective than many common building features such as windows, and they are designed to absorb light rather than reflect it. We are conducting a comprehensive assessment of glint and glare from solar panels to understand the impact on local aerodromes and will be working with them to mitigate this.

	The findings of the assessments will form part of the PEIR. The PEIR will present the preliminary findings of the assessments on glint and glare on local aerodromes. It will also present the placement of the solar panels and associated infrastructure to mitigate impact on aerodromes.
Operation Participants raised concerns about the proposed 60-year operational term and claimed it is too long. Participants also raised the loss of agricultural land and the impact on current levels of food production in the UK.	The site is considered a 'temporary' development, meaning it would be decommissioned after a set period and returned to its original use. Further information on decommissioning will be provided in the PEIR and the DCO submission. We will be submitting an agricultural land classification survey as part of our DCO application, which will determine the grading of land within the site. Soil surveys are being undertaken. The Independent National Food Strategy Review shows that solar farms do not in any way present a risk to the UK's food security. Indeed, the reverse is true: the solar industry is working closely with Britain's farmers to reduce their energy costs and improve the sustainability of their operations. • Solar panels currently take up 0.1% of the UK's land, and government plans would require no more than 0.3% in order to provide about 12% of the UK's energy needs. • The government's UK Food Security Report (2021) acknowledges that climate change and soil health pose the biggest risk to food security in the UK and worldwide. • Government plans require just 0.3% of the country's land to be used for solar – reducing energy costs and carbon emissions. That's less than we use for golf courses. Furthermore, the money that farmers and landowners receive from having solar panels on parts of their land makes their food production operations more economically viable and sustainable.
Public rights of way/transport Participants provided valuable feedback about the current condition of local roads and examples of routes and access points that would not be suitable for heavy goods vehicles during the construction phase. Participants also raised concerns on the	We are undertaking assessments of local routes to assess traffic flows and inform the preferred route for construction and access points to the sites. The findings of the assessment will be considered as part of the production of the draft master plan and will inform our assessments of the local area in terms of local biodiversity, access routes and public rights of way, ahead of the statutory consultation this winter. Access to the public rights of way will be
increase in local traffic, particularly on the A45, which has high levels of traffic.	retained and improvements will be made near the site. A comprehensive Construction Traffic Management Plan and Construction Environmental Management Plan will ensure controlled construction activities. Once operational, vehicle movements will be limited to occasional maintenance visits, other than during the replacement of any panels and batteries.
Flood Participants raised concerns about the high level of flooding in the area and asked if this could be reflected in the current assessments of the flood zones.	A flood risk assessment and a drainage statement will be prepared as part of the DCO application. A combined water quality, flood risk and drainage assessment will consider the impacts of the scheme through the construction, operation and decommissioning phases.
Community benefits Participants provided insights into local community projects and places that would benefit from community benefit funds, such as Sywell Country Park. Questions were asked if funding would be provided to subsidise electricity for residents closest to the sites.	Island Green Power is committed to working closely with the community to develop the project and ensure those who are hosting the infrastructure also see tangible local benefits. We will ensure, wherever possible, that local contractors and suppliers have the opportunity to become part of the GHSF development through the procurement process. Most employment and contractor opportunities will likely be during the construction phase of the project. Our communication channels are open for feedback and suggestions. If you have ideas or suggestions for the community fund, please tell us by contacting us.

Frequently asked questions

During the workshops, attendees raised a series of specific questions related to the project. We have summarised our answers to these below with further information available on our website: https://greenhillsolar.co.uk.

Design

Where will the associated infrastructure such as inverters be developed?

The location of inverters, to convert the power generated by the solar panels, is currently being determined. Early land surveys and assessments to determine the indicative site layout and cable routes are being conducted. Further details will be made available ahead of our public consultation.

Why don't you propose solar panels on rooftops of industrial sites?

While emphasising the need for more rooftop generation, the latest Energy Security Strategy continues to recognise that ground-mounted solar is also important because it can contribute a much larger amount of energy generation than rooftop solar. It is very likely impossible for the government to achieve its goal of 70 GW of solar electricity by 2035 without the use of ground-mounted solar sites.

Is energy storage safe?

We recognise public concerns about the safety of BESS Sites. Our BESS sites are developed to adhere to safety standards and regulations, and we take extra care to ensure that additional measures are also taken during construction and operation to preserve this. A battery safety management plan will be submitted with the application.

A perimeter fence would enclose the site and would include free-standing CCTV cameras with motion-activated lighting pointing inwards towards the site to ensure the safety and protection of the BESS equipment.

Ecology and biodiversity

What are examples of mitigation measures in ecology?

New planting would support a diverse range of critical invertebrate species and encourage new species to colonise the margins of the site. There are potential further opportunities for habitat creation through the implementation of additional wildlife corridors and the installation of bat and bird nesting boxes, hibernacula, woodpiles and beehives within the margins of the site. The species of new planting will be determined following the findings of ongoing assessments.

Landscape and visual Impact

Will an assessment of the landscape around the cable route search area be available to view?

We are currently undertaking early land surveys and assessments to determine the indicative site layout and cable routes. A study area of 0.5 km is proposed from the outer boundary of the cable route search area. The 0.5 km radius is considered appropriate for the cable route search area as this involves the construction phase only, which is short-term and temporary.

Further details – including an indicative site layout – will be made available ahead of our statutory public consultation.

What plant species would you use for screenings?

Our design process is landscape-led and seeks to take advantage of natural screening due to contours in the land and existing hedgerows and woodland. As solar panels are low-profile compared to other forms of infrastructure they can be easily screened. Screening would be improved with reinforcement or new planting utilising native species of hedgerows and trees.

Heritage

What cultural heritage aspects are being considered?

The cultural heritage assessments will study above-ground landmarks and local features. The team will also undertake archaeological surveys for the scheme in consultation with Historic England and the council's archaeologists. This will provide the information we need to assess if there are any impacts, influence the design of the scheme and identify an appropriate mitigation strategy if required.

Community benefit

What real benefit will local residents get? Will it be subsidised electricity?

We encourage local residents to provide details of local community initiatives and projects that would benefit from support through the development of GHSF.

We cannot subsidise the cost of electricity for local communities; however, by developing the solar farm, we will increase renewable energy in the UK. This will reduce the country's reliance on non-renewable energy sources such as fossil fuels and help make energy prices more affordable.

Public rights of way/transport

What will be the impact on local footpaths?

Access to the public rights of way will be retained, and improvements will be made where appropriate. Permissive footpaths are being considered to provide additional public access to the countryside. The feedback from the workshops will be considered as part of the production of the detailed design and will inform our assessments of the local area in terms of public rights of way ahead of the statutory consultation this winter.

How will you mitigate the impact on local countryside roads during construction?

The DCO application will include a transport assessment which will assess the significance of transport-related impacts in the area as a result of the construction, operation and decommissioning of the scheme. The transport assessment will include an abnormal loads assessment and the DCO will be supported by an Outline Public Rights of Way Management Plan and Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan.

Will connection to the substation be via the A45, as that already has heavy traffic?

We have noted the concern about the potential impact on the A45. The access routes are currently being considered and further details will be provided at statutory consultation.

Flood

The River Nene floods regularly – will there be a drainage system to direct water off the sites?

Flood risk does not increase with the installation of solar farms, as only a very small proportion of the solar farm is in direct contact with the ground, and the layout of the panels would take account of any areas of potential flood risk. National planning policy requires all planning applications above certain thresholds to include a flood risk assessment (FRA), including mitigation in the form of a drainage strategy.

An FRA and surface water drainage strategy would be provided as part of the planning application. Any potential flood risk to the site will likely be mitigated by locating infrastructure in areas of lowest flood risk. Where the site is at higher risk of flooding the area will be subject to a detailed hydraulic modelling exercise, which will ensure it will not flood or have a detrimental impact on neighbouring offsite areas. Where the flood risk cannot be avoided, flood resistance and resilience measures will be utilised.

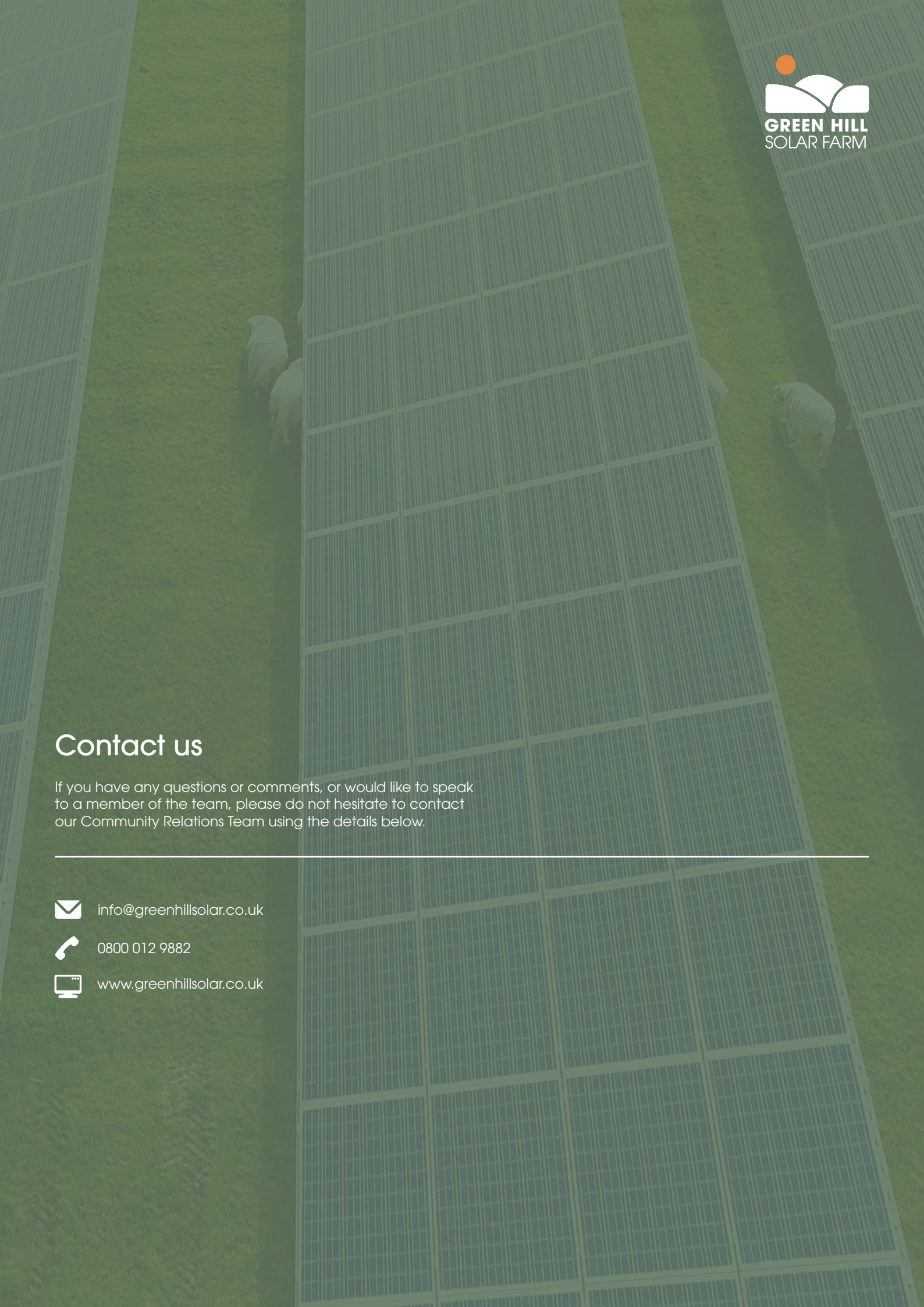
Next steps – Consultation and engagement

Thank you to everyone who gave their time to provide feedback at our project workshops. This information is invaluable and will be factored into the master-planning process for GHSF, including how we refine the early design proposals. During our statutory consultation, currently scheduled to take place this winter, a more detailed design will be presented, along our Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC).

The SoCC will describe how we plan to engage with the local communities as part of the statutory consultation.

We will consult with Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) on our approach to statutory consultation before publishing this statement and launching the statutory consultation.

Engagement will continue with key stakeholders in West Northamptonshire, North Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes, including local parishes, community groups, charities and landowners. We will also be engaging with statutory consultees, LPAs, environmental groups and local stakeholders to refine our proposals.



GREEN HILL
SOLAR FARM

Contact us

If you have any questions or comments, or would like to speak to a member of the team, please do not hesitate to contact our Community Relations Team using the details below.

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www.greenhillsolar.co.uk