

Information sheet:

DESIGNING SOLAR FARM RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT - A link to current guidance:

This guidance link is aimed at signposting developers and other interested parties to the current guidance on designing acceptable solar farm renewable energy development and offers a check list for use when considering potential solar farm renewable energy sites within the Colchester Borough.

The following broadly generic guidelines are drawn from both a national and local level and are referenced by the Council when assessing any design proposals for solar farm renewable energy development, together with any site specific considerations. It is recommended that any developer looking to make a planning application for solar farm renewable energy development within Colchester Borough assess their proposals against the following guidelines, as appropriate, during the pre-application design stage, this to ensure the relevant guidelines are followed and policies compiled with:

National guidance:

1. DCLG - NPPG: 'Renewable and low carbon energy' @ http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy/particular-planning-considerations-for-hydropower-active-solar-technology-solar-farms-and-wind-turbines/#paragraph_013
2. DECC: 'UK Solar PV Strategy Part 1- Roadmap to a Brighter Future' @ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249277/UK_Solar_PV_Strategy_Part_1_Roadmap_to_a_Brighter_Future_08.10.pdf
3. BRE: 'Planning guidance for the development of large scale ground mounted solar PV systems' @ http://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdf/other_pdfs/KN5524_Planning_Guidance_reduced.pdf
4. NE: 'Solar parks: maximising environmental benefits (TIN101)' @ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/32027?category=9001>
5. STA: 'Solar Farms: 10 Commitments' (industry guidelines) @ <http://www.solar-trade.org.uk/media/STA%2010%20commitments%20v%2010.pdf>

Local guidance:

1. CBC: 'Local Development Framework Development Policies' (principally policies DP1, DP21, DP22, DP23 & the principal policy DP25) @ <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=1692&p=0>
2. CBC: 'Colchester Borough Council Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Construction' @ <http://www.colchester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=2593&p=0>
3. Dedham Vale AONB - 'Development in the setting of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' @ <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/assets/planning/Setting-of-Dedham-Vale-AONB.pdf>

As a refinement to the above the Council advised that when initially considering the suitability of potential solar farm renewable energy sites for development within Colchester Borough the following site specific check list is applied to assess the appropriateness of the site for such development, this designed as an aid to better site selection and project design:

1. Does the site fall within or impact upon a designated landscape, i.e. is it within the Dedham Vale AONB or within/adjoining a Registered Park or Garden or would it affect the setting of a designated area? National and local planning policies seek to protect such areas from development that would be incompatible with the reasons for these designations.
2. Does the site fall within the land classification for the best and most versatile land (grades 1, 2 or 3a)?
3. Is the site previously developed land as this is sequentially preferable?
4. Have you consulted with the local community and is there a majority in support of the scheme?
5. Does the site contain or adjoin heritage assets such as listed buildings or scheduled monuments and if so, how can you effectively mitigate the impact upon their setting?
6. Can you deliver a landscape legacy for the period following the removal of the installation; in terms of enhanced or reinstated hedgerows for example?
7. Have you considered the density/separation of PV strings in the context of the site and how the land will be used whilst the arrays are present?
8. What value does the existing habitat present for wildlife and what species are present currently and how will these adapt to the proposed installation?
9. What is the existing landscape character (refer to Colchester LCA) and how is this compatible with the proposed installation?
10. Are there publically available views and do public rights of way cross the site or run close to the site and afford potential views?

Note: the above should not be taken as a finite list of the guidance available on this subject and will be subject to regular review and amendment as appropriate as best practice develops within the field of renewable energy development design.