

Bubney Solar Farm

CONSULTATION REPORT

On Behalf Of Renewable Connections Developments
Limited



BUBNEY SOLAR FARM

CONSULTATION REPORT

ON BEHALF OF RENEWABLE CONNECTIONS DEVELOPMENT LIMITED

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

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Pegasus Group

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 **DESIGN**  **ENVIRONMENT**  **PLANNING**  **ECONOMICS**  **HERITAGE**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Consultation Report sets out a summary of the pre-application consultation and communication undertaken by Renewable Connections Developments Ltd ("Renewable Connections") with the local community and stakeholders for a proposed ground-mounted solar farm at Bubney Farm, Grindley Brook, Whitchurch, SY13 4QH.
- 1.2 This report sets out the aims of the community engagement; the pre-application communication undertaken to date; its outcomes and how any feedback has been used to guide the proposed development.
- 1.3 Renewable Connections have considered and taken into account the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) of Shropshire Council through the development of the proposal and associated communications with the local community. The focus of the public engagement has been towards the local community surround the site. The formal consultation period started on 7 August 2020 and the local community were asked to submit any observation by 4 September 2020. Notwithstanding this, the purpose community consultation website has remained active up until the point of submission and will continue to be live at least until the point of determination of the planning application.

2.0 Planning Policy Framework

2.1 The main planning policy references for pre-application community consultation relevant to the proposals are:

- Shropshire Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), adopted on 24 February 2011;
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published February 2019; and
- The National Planning Practice Guidance web-based resource (PPG), first published March 2014, and as amended.

Shropshire Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (2011)

2.2 Shropshire Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was first published on 24 February 2011 and emphasis that the Council will work with local communities, businesses and other interested parties so that everyone can be well informed and understand how they can contribute, engage and influence planning policy and planning decisions.

2.3 With regards to pre-application consultation with the local community, paragraphs 5.38 and 5.39 of the SCI state:

"There are no formal requirements to be met by applicants or the council in consulting on pre-application stages of planning applications. However, it is widely accepted that there should be an element of public engagement prior to the submission of all planning applications, whether this be in conversation with neighbours, or public displays and formal meetings.

This public engagement can range from informal discussions with neighbours the case of household or minor application, through more formal consultation with Parish Councils and local communities on more significant applications through, for example, community discussions, displays and exhibitions."

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2019)

2.4 The NPPF sets out the national planning policy for the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system.

2.5 In addressing the need for pre-application consultation, paragraph 39 of the NPPF states:

"Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community."

2.6 Paragraph 40 sets out the roles of the local planning authorities, stating:

"(Local planning authorities) should, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicant s who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications".

2.7 The applicant is therefore encouraged to provide evidence of how the community have been involved in pre-applications discussion concerning the proposed development.

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

2.8 The NPPF web-based resource further raises the importance of consultation in the planning process, in particular the desire to "front-load" consultation in the form of pre-application discussions.

2.9 The UK Government has released guidance for LPAs and applicants to follow

during this national crisis. Temporary changes to the publicity requirements for certain planning application have been introduced through the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure, Listed Buildings and Environmental impacts Assessment) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to support timely decision-making and avoid delays to development as a result of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, while maintaining public participation in the decision-making process. The UK government has been clear in its advice that the planning sector should carry on, despite disruptions cause by Covid-19.

3.0 Community Engagement Strategy

- 3.1 The applicant is committed to best practice in community consultation and communication throughout the planning process, as recommended by Shropshire Council's SCI and Government Guidance. Renewable Connections recognise the importance that can be brought to local communities and key stakeholders through appropriate inclusive pre-application consultation and communications.
- 3.2 Renewable Connections acknowledge the requirements for community engagement as set out within the Localism Act 2011. As this Consultation Report sets out, Renewable Connections Development Ltd have proactively contact the local community and given them the opportunity to give feedback before any planning application is submitted, affording community members and local Parish Council members the chance to influence and shape the proposed development before it was finalised.
- 3.3 The applicant also recognises that local people can contribute their knowledge and understanding of the locality, its past and its distinctive and valuable features that they deem worthy of protection that might otherwise be overlooked.
- 3.4 A proportionate programme of public and stakeholder engagement has been adopted through the development of the proposals.

Aims and Objectives

- 3.5 The aims and objectives of the programme to date have been to inform and engage with the local communities and local stakeholders surrounding the application site.
- 3.6 The key objections of the communications undertaken so far include: -

- To ensure, as far as possible, that local people are aware of the proposals and have every opportunity to express their views to the project team before the planning application is finalised and submitted to the local planning authority.
- To provide the community and stakeholders with the opportunity to feed into the scope of the assessments being undertaken to support the proposal.
- To inform and engage with local communities about the need for the proposal.
- To understand views of the local community towards the proposal.
- To understand and address any concerns in the community.
- To ascertain views from the wider area.

3.7 Through implementing these objectives Renewable Connections have aimed to effectively communicate and clarify information, allay any concerns, and respond to issues raised through the detail of the planning submission and accompanying suite of supporting information.

4.0 Consultation and Engagement Methods

4.1 To ensure that a sufficient local stakeholder audience has been informed about the proposal, and given the opportunity to engage, proportionate consultation measures have been used throughout the planning process up to the point of the planning application submission.

4.2 Importantly, the strategy for community consultation was modified to reflect the COVID-19 movement restrictions. Renewable Connections usual strategy involved a leaflet drop following by a community exhibition. However, it was not possible due to hold an exhibition due to Government implemented restrictions. The exhibition was replaced by a project website with an interactive comments form and opportunities for open correspondence between stakeholders and the project team via telephone, email and offers of virtual meetings.

4.3 Details of the various methods are summarised below.

Leaflet Drop

4.4 The consultation leaflet drop is a fundamental component of the engagement process, allowing information about the project to reach a target audience.

4.5 A leaflet was distributed to 2,762no. addresses within 2km surrounding the application site. The size of the leaflet drop area was determined by the location of nearby residents who could be affected by the building and operational phases of the development. In this instance it was set at 2km from the boundary of the site. The purpose of the purpose of the leaflet was to:

- Provide initial project information;
- Invite members of the public to view the purposely built website page; and
- Provide contact details of the project team.

-
- 4.6 The leaflet was distributed on 7th August 2020. A copy of the leaflet is provided at Appendix 1.
- 4.7 Consultation letters were also issued to the local ward members and parish councils which were in proximity to the application site, namely: -
- Whitchurch Rural Parish Council
 - Bronington Community Council
 - Cllr Peggy Mullock
 - Cllr Thomas Biggins
 - MP Owen Paterson
- 4.8 The applicant duly acknowledged that due to an administrative error, Whitchurch Urban Parish Council did not receive copy of the consultation leaflet and therefore were not formally informed of the proposed development at the same time as the wider community. Notwithstanding this, as outlined under subheading 'Final Stakeholder Communications', Whitchurch Urban Parish Council have now been made aware of the proposed development and an imminent submission of the planning application. Although the parish council was not formally consulted a large proportion of the residents within the Whitchurch Urban Parish Council were informed through the leaflet drop capturing their properties within the 2km radius of the site.

Final Stakeholder Communication

- 4.9 In March 2021, ahead of submitting the planning application, the project team engaged in communication with Whitchurch Urban Parish Council, including Cllr Chester and Cllr Shepherd, as well as Shropshire Ward Councillors. Shropshire Ward Councillors Cllr Mullock and Cllr Biggins were all contact via the telephone to discuss the proposed development.
- 4.10 The feedback received in this consultation is summarised at the end of section 5.0 of this report.

Project Website

4.11 The project website (<https://www.bubneysolarfarm.co.uk/>) contained all the information that would usually be displayed at a consultation event. The website was 'made live' on 1 July 2021 and it remains live. The website was designed to clearly display key information relating to the proposed development online, in the same way that consultation board would ordinarily be used at a public exhibition event. The project website remains live and is periodically refreshed with the latest development proposals and project updates during the course of the planning stage.

4.12 The website was made up of the following pages:

- Home – this page provides a brief introduction to the proposed development, locates the site, introduced Renewable Connections, and explains why the development is proposed at this site.
- Importance of Solar Farms – this page provides some context to the need for renewable energy developments.
- Site Assessment – this page provides site specific information relating to the Agricultural Land Classification, highways and access, flood risk, cultural heritage, landscape and visual impact, ecology and biodiversity.
- Development Proposal – this page describes the proposed development at the site.
- Contact – this page provides the relevant contact details for interested parties to get in touch, either directly through the website form, post, email or telephone. Here it was indicated that interested parties should respond by 4th September 2020.

4.13 A copy of the relevant webpages discussed above is provided at Appendix 2.

5.0 Detailed Results of Consultation

5.1 This section details the results of the community consultation.

Website

5.2 The website went live on 1 July 2020 and remains live. The audience overview is presented at Appendix 3, the salient points are set out below: -

- Up to 30 September 2020, the website attracted 410 new visitors, with 15.5% of the visitors returning to the website on two or more occasions.
- The average session per uses was 2 minutes and 13 seconds.
- From 1 July 2020 up to 28 February 2021, the website attracted a total of 622 new visitors, with 14.2% of the visitors returning to the website on two or more occasions.
- From 1 July 2020 up to 28 February 2021 the page was viewed 1,733 times.

5.3 Amended plans have been placed on the project website and the applicant intends to update the website accordingly during the council's determination of the planning application.

Community Feedback

5.4 Interested parties were able to provide feedback by post, telephone, email address or using the contact / comment box on the project's website.

5.5 A total of 20no. comments were received by Pegasus Group and these are discussed below. The applicant was unable to offer in person meetings to coincide with the Government regulations to reduce the unnecessary contact between people during the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.6 Each of the below respondents were individually responded to predominantly via email or some on the telephone.

Respondent A

- 5.7 Respondent A asked if the PRow would be open during the construction phase. They also asked for further information regarding battery storage at the site, which was referred to in the consultation leaflet as a potential later phase of development at the site. They comment that battery storage is working satisfactorily in the South Australia. They asked if the battery storage would be subject to a separate planning application.
- 5.8 An email was sent to Respondent B thanking them for their engagement in the community consultation and to explaining that the development will not stop or alter any existing public accesses through the site. The email also stated that any future battery capacity has not yet been confirmed and that the full planning application will comprise all details of the proposed development; details of the final scheme would be included within the Planning Statement submitted as part of the full planning application.

Respondent B

- 5.9 Respondent B enquired if there would be any noise or light pollution from this installation of the solar photovoltaics, commenting that just a 'buzz' could be very disruptive.

An email was sent to Respondent B thanking them for their engagement in the community consultation and to explain that impacts of the development will be outlined and assessed in the full planning application submission. It was confirmed with Respondent B that only emergency lighting will be included as part of the proposed development at the site. The email also explained any infrastructure ancillary to the development that creates noises is commonly located at the centre of the site to prevent any noise pollution beyond the site boundary. Where Public Rights of Way pass through the site and any ancillary infrastructure, noise pollution will be negligible. Furthermore, Environmental Health Officers will be consulted, once the planning application has been submitted to the Council, to assess the proposals impact on amenity.

Respondent C

- 5.10 Respondent C asked as a local resident if they could purchase energy direct or would the operator be supplying energy companies only.
- 5.11 An email was sent to Respondent C thanking them for their engagement in the community consultation and to explain that they will not be able to purchase electricity directly from the site. Energy created at the site is fed into the national grid and shared accordingly to energy providers to disperse.

Respondent D

- 5.12 Respondent D asked if we could provide 12no. copies of the public consultation form or let them have an address where it could be downloaded.
- 5.13 An email was sent to Respondent D explaining that there aren't specific consultation forms and they were invited to submit comments through the website, via email or in the post.

Respondent E

- 5.14 Respondent E submitted comments on behalf of Shropshire and Telford Community Energy (STCE) to introduce themselves and to support the planning application.
- 5.15 An email was sent to Respondent E thanking them for their engagement in the proposed development and that their details had been passed onto the applicant.

Respondent F

- 5.16 Respondent F commented that it was positive to see Bubney becoming ecologically aware. Respondent F stated it is a good project as long as the

existing PRoW are carefully persevered. They recognised and supported the potential ecological benefits the development could have at the site.

- 5.17 An email response was issued to Respondent F thanking them for engaging in the proposed development. The email also confirmed the proposed development seeks to retain all existing PRoW and bridlepaths and reiterate the ecological benefits that the proposed development could bring to the site.

Respondent G

- 5.18 Respondent G sent an email thanking the applicant for issuing the consultation leaflet. They said providing the footpaths are respected to maintain existing access and the existing nature is maintained they support the proposed development.

- 5.19 Similar to Respondent F, an email was issued to Respondent G thanking them for responding to the consultation. The email also confirmed the proposed development seeks to retain all existing PRoW and bridlepaths and reiterate the ecological benefits that the proposed development could bring to the site.

Respondent H

- 5.20 Respondent H submitted a detailed response to the community consultation on behalf of the neighbouring Iscoyd Park Estate to the west of the application site. The response highlighted the Park Estate's key concerns including, visual impact on the Park Estate, noise disturbance during construction, increase in vehicle movements at the site as a result of the loss of agricultural land, and assurance the proposed development is only temporary in that any permissions require the land to return back to agricultural use.

A detailed email was prepared to respond to each individual aspect of the Park Estate's comments. It was explained that a detailed Landscape and Visual Impact, and Heritage Assessment, would be prepared and submitted as part of the planning application submission. The response explained it is

commonplace for the local planning authority to request a Construction Management Plan to be submitted to the council for approved ahead of the commencement of any approved development and that this would outline proposed construction hours to be agreed by the council. The response also explained a Construction Traffic Management Plan would be submitted as part of the planning application to assess the construction would have on the local and strategic highway network. Respondent was informed all of these documents would be made available for the public to review and submit comment during the statutory consultation period. In addition, the response explained Respondent H that should planning permission be granted, the permission would be temporary and expire after 40 years - this would be restricted to a number of years and this would be controlled through a planning condition. It was also explained the land would have to be returned to its current agricultural use after the approved period of time for the development.

Respondent I

- 5.21 Respondent I raised concerns that the loss of agricultural land at the site would result in additional vehicle movements to facilitate the existing dairy operations at Bubney Farm. Respondent I expanded to say that additional vehicle movements would have a negative impact on the amenity of the area through smell and noise pollution.
- 5.22 An email was sent to Respondent I acknowledging their comments and stating that we would request the data of existing vehicle movements at the site and those anticipated if the proposed development was approved and implemented. This information has been sought from the farmer at Bubney Farm and included within the Construction Traffic Management Plan submitted with this application.

Respondent J

- 5.23 Respondent J explained their support for development that support UK's drive to net zero. They then continue to explain their opinion that there is significant excess solar capacity and there is a forecast reduction in solar demand.

Respondent J suggests this is driving up energy prices. Respondent J contends the site should not be used for solar development just because there is grid capacity in the area. Respondent J continues to explain their concerns with the developments impact on the landscape and ecology at the site. Respondent J suggests the development should be located elsewhere, not visible from a byway or PRoW and be reduced to 10MW. Respondent J then submitted a subsequent comment via the project website referring the project team to the letter he had submitted via email (as summarised above) and reiterating their objection to the proposed development.

- 5.24 An email response was sent to Respondent J thanking them for their response to the consultation and to acknowledge their comments. Respondent J was advised that their concerns regarding the need for solar energy generation was passed onto the applicant. The email explained to Respondent J that their concerns regarding landscape and ecology would be assessed in detail as part of the development process and the technical reports would be made available by the council once an application had been submitted and validated.

Respondent K

- 5.25 Respondent K (a direct neighbour to the site) contacted the project team via the telephone to explain that they have views over the site from their property and some other land, although not located immediately adjacent to the site, also has views over the site. Their comments refer to the existing dairy operations at Bubney Farm. Respondent K's main concern relates to the impact the loss of agricultural land at Bubney Farm would have on the vehicle movements associated with existing operations at the Bubney Farm i.e. potential additional movement for slurry and animal feed. Their second concern is the scale of the development, suggesting that wind turbines would take up less space. Their third concern is any impact the development will have on the existing boundary trees and that they would not want to see these lost. These comments were then reiterated in a letter sent to the project team.
- 5.26 An initial telephone conversation was had with Respondent K noting down their

comments and thanking them for engaging in the consultation. Since receipt of the letter and during the preparation of the planning application, frequent phone calls have been had with Respondent K to provide them with updates of the project. It was explained to Respondent K that the existing vehicle movements for the current operations at Bubney Farm would be and now have been provided by the farmer, and that these would be compared with the anticipated vehicle movements should the proposed development be approved and implemented; concluding that these will be included within the Construction Traffic Management Plan report submitted as part of the planning application. It was explained that this report will be made publicly available by the council.

- 5.27 In addition to the above, the project team offered virtual meetings with Respondent K as a neighbouring resident to discuss the proposed development and consider their comments in the process. Respondent K explained that they didn't have access to the internet and therefore a virtual meeting wouldn't be possible. A telephone conversation with the project team was also offered but not taken up by Respondent K. An illustrative Block Plan of the site was sent in the post to Respondent K as a neighbouring resident and a follow up discussion was had over the telephone with Pegasus Group. The conversation was focussed on Respondent K's queries regarding each element of the proposal e.g. what will be located where, the type of fencing proposed, any lighting within the site, maintenance of hedgerows and additional proposed boundary planting.

Respondent L

- 5.28 Respondent L raised concerns over the scale of the proposed development, loss of agricultural land, impact on vehicle movements associated with Bubney Farm and the ancillary impact this has on pollution, construction traffic, visual impact due to existing screening, and the potential ecological impact and loss of biodiversity at the site.
- 5.29 An email was sent to Respondent L acknowledging and thanking them for their comments. The email clarified the proposed development does not seek to

intensify any existing operations at Bubney Farm and that a construction Traffic Management Plan would be prepared and submitted as part of the planning application to assess the development's impact on the highway network. It was also explained that the full application would be supported with a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment assessing and describing existing and proposed planting at the site. The email also outlined to Respondent L that following submission of the planning application there would be a statutory consultation period where they could submit comments following review of the detailed submission documents.

- 5.30 Since the initial email to Respondent L there has been a few emails exchanged regarding the progress the development proposal. The latest in March 2021 confirming that the project team would inform them once the application was submitted and where the documents could be found for their review.

Respondent M

- 5.31 Respondent M submitted a response to the consultation outlining that they had several objections to the proposed development. The consultation response explained their main concern was the loss of agricultural land and how this may increase vehicle movements at Bubney Farm as there would be less land to support the existing dairy operations at Bubney Farm. Respondent M considers that the development would make the dairy farming less self-sufficient having an impact on its sustainability. Respondent M has concerns that the additional movements would harm the safety of the highway and have a negative impact on the carbon emission and noise pollution. Respondent M also has concerns over the developments impact on visual amenity from Canal Cottage and Danson's Farm, as well as from PRow's. To conclude Respondent M states they cannot support any proposals that would result in the loss of existing mature vegetation.
- 5.32 An email was sent to Respondent M thanking them for their engagement in the community consultation. The project team acknowledged their comments and they have been considered in the preparation of the preparation of a planning application. It was also explained to Respondent M that a lot of the detail there

were concerns about i.e. vehicle movements, impact on landscape and boundary / vegetation treatment would be addressed and included in the full planning application submission for their review.

Respondent N

- 5.33 Respondent N outlined three concerns: scale of the development, PRoW access and protection against the loss of trees, vegetation and biodiversity. Respondent N asked two questions accompanying their concerns; what the proposed screening methods are if there be continued access along the footpaths.
- 5.34 An email was sent to Respondent N explaining that as part of the preparation of an application a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment would be completed to assess the scale of development in the landscape. It was explained that this assessment would be submitted as part of the planning application submission and made available for public to review. Respondent N was informed that the applicant would act proactively, and have done so, to ensure minimal loss of existing vegetation and ecologically whilst aiming to establish an increase in ecological value at the site. The email outlined that application would be supported by a Landscape Environmental Management Plan to achieve this, and that it would also be made publicly available once an application was validated by the council.

Stakeholder Engagement

- 5.35 No responses have been received from Whitchurch Rural Parish Council or Bronington Community Council since the commencement of the community consultation.
- 5.36 No response was received by MP Owen Paterson during the community consultation. Letters were also sent to Cllr Mullock and Cllr Biggins however no response was received at the time. However, the project team contacted them again in March 2021 via telephone and discussed the proposed development.

A summary of their discussions and feedback is included in paragraphs 5.44 and 5.45 of this report.

- 5.37 During the pre-application advice request to Shropshire Council, the Public Rights of Way Officer recommended that we engage with the British Horse Society (BHS) and the Shropshire Ramblers group specifically regarding the minimum width included within the site layout for the continued use of the PRoW and bridleways. An electronic copy of the consultation leaflet was sent to the stakeholders separately inviting them to engage in the proposed development. No responses were received so a follow-up email was issued a couple of weeks later. In late 2020 the BHS contacted Pegasus Group to discuss the proposals. BHS wanted asked about whether the existing accesses through the site would be retained; Pegasus Group confirmed they would be. BHS supported the proposed 10m width for the existing accesses noting that this would be welcoming with the BHS. BHS supported the scheme and said that they would do some background work into whether they could match the enhancements proposed at the site by improving the bridleways leading to and from the application site. No responses were received from Shropshire Ramblers group.
- 5.38 When contacting Whitchurch Urban Parish Council, in March 2021, the project team were advised to correspond directly with Cllr Chester. The proposed development and the site location were explained to Cllr Chester. Cllr Chester supported the principle of solar energy but would not comment further until they saw more details. Cllr Chester recommended engaging with Cllr Shepperd who leads on planning issues.
- 5.39 Cllr Shepperd was aware of the proposed development because of receiving the consultation leaflet in September 2020. In summary, Cllr Shepherd:
- enquired about the level of community consultation that has taken place;
 - suggested due to the imminent submission of the application a post submission presentation to the Parish would be welcomed recommending the project team contact the Parish Clerk to make arrangements; and
 - was not sure how the public or Parish members would react to the plans.

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- 5.40 Since the conversations with Cllr Chester and Cllr Shepherd the project team are scheduling a meeting with the parish council to present and discuss the proposed development. The date of the presentation is to be agreed.
- 5.41 Shropshire Ward Councillors Cllr Mullock and Cllr Biggins both engaged in the pre-submission consultation. Cllr Mullock appreciated the direct engagement by telephone and the project team sharing information regarding the proposed development. Cllr Mullock was, in principle, supportive of solar power development. Cllr Mullock explain they had not received any correspondence regarding the proposals from any local residents but was unsure how the community would react to the development. Cllr Mullock advised the project team should consider contacting the other Whitchurch ward councillors.
- 5.42 Cllr Biggins was aware of the proposed development because of the community consultation leaflet. They described the site as well screened and did not perceive there to be an initial issue with the development however would be guided by the local residents. Cllr Biggins was interested in the technicalities of local grid network capacity and his questions were answered by the project team.

6.0 Consultation with The Local Planning Authority

- 6.1 The applicant has also sought to consult with the local planning authority. This comprised a formal pre-application advice request submission, EIA Screening Opinion Request and direct discussion with specialist officers at Shropshire Council.
- 6.2 A pre-application advice request was submitted to Shropshire Council on 23rd June 2020. The pre-application was validated under case reference number PREAPP/20/00242.
- 6.3 The pre-application advice was received from Shropshire Council on 24th September 2020. The Council considered the development to be acceptable in principle, however, acknowledged that due to the nature, scale and location of the proposed development, there is the potential to have an adverse impact upon the local area and land users. It was acknowledged that the development of greenfield land and use of best and most versatile agricultural land were of particular concern, and would need to be fully addressed in order to gain officer support. The advice emphasised that detailed assessments were needed to be undertaken and submitted as part of any future planning application to understand any potential impacts, and to identify what level of protection, mitigation and enhancement of identified assets may be appropriate. It was also identified that the sustainability and other benefits of the scheme should be described as part of any planning application so that these can be weighed against any identified harm.
- 6.4 A copy of the Pre-application Advice received by Shropshire Council is included in Appendix of the Planning Statement submitted as part of this planning application.
- 6.5 During the pre-application advice discussions with Shropshire Council the PRoW Officer recommended that the project team engage with the British Horse Society and Shropshire Ramblers group to seek their comments regarding the PRoWs and bridlepaths passing through the site. The feedback

received has been summarised early in this report (see paragraph 5.40).

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 Renewable Connections have designed and delivered a comprehensive proportionate pre-application consultation programme in order to proactively communicate and engage with the local community and key stakeholders.
- 7.2 The consultation strategy was designed to respond and adopt to the restrictions on physical movement and contact as imposed by Government's COVID-19 response. Whilst it was not possible to hold a public exhibition, the applicant ensured that the combination of a leaflet drop and project website delivered a robust and meaningful pre-submission consultation package.
- 7.3 The responses from the public were constructive and insightful. Most of the comments received sought further clarification on the details of the planning development. These comments specifically related to how the proposed solar development and temporary change of use of agricultural land would affect the vehicle movements associated with the existing dairy operations at Bubney Farm. As a result, statistics of existing and future vehicle movements have been assessed and included within the Construction Traffic Management Plan.
- 7.4 Comments received from the public referring to the ecological value and visual impact have also fed into the proposed development. A number of ecological enhancements are included within the proposed development and any perceived impacts on landscape have been mitigated through proposed planting around the site. Please see the Ecological Assessment and Landscape documents (LVIA, LEMP and proposed Landscape Plan) submitted as part of the planning application for further details.

APPENDIX 1

Bubney Solar Farm Consultation Leaflet

What are the benefits of Bubney Road Solar Farm?

The main benefits of the development proposed are summarised below:

- The site would generate enough renewable power to supply the equivalent annual energy needs of more than 9,090 homes, making a significant contribution to local clean power and regional renewable targets.
- The scheme would displace 12,900 tonnes of CO₂ from equivalent fossil fuel generation over the lifespan of 40 years.
- The scheme would allow Shropshire to play its part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with local, national and international targets.
- The site will offer considerable biodiversity and landscape enhancements. Both will be carefully managed with a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan.
- The site can still be used for grazing throughout the operation of the solar farm and can be returned to its original agricultural use following decommissioning.



Consultation

This leaflet has been distributed to the residents and businesses which surround the site and provides an overview of the development proposal. Additional information is provided on our website and this will be periodically updated with the latest information regarding timeframes for planning submissions, layout and other information.

We welcome all feedback from the community on our draft proposals. The feedback can be provided via the project website, or by email or post using the details provided.

Comments provided by the local community will be taken into account in shaping the final planning application submission. We request that comments are provided by **5pm on Friday 4th September.**

www.bubneysolarfarm.co.uk

Next Stage

We are aiming to submit a planning application to Shropshire Council in the late summer of 2020. As part of the formal planning application process, the Council will also carry out their own consultation.



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BUBNEY SOLAR FARM

Public Consultation

Introducing Bubney Solar Farm

Renewable Connections is proposing a renewable energy scheme on land at Bubney Farm, Grindley Brook, Whitchurch, SY13 4QH. It is envisaged that Bubney Solar Farm will have a generating capacity of up to 30 megawatts. To fully utilise the network connection capacity, the farm may include battery storage as a second phase of development which will store energy for times of peak demand. A grid connection route is proposed to the north east to connect the proposed solar PV development to the existing Whitchurch substation located on the A41. This includes a simple cable route through the fields along the track and onto the A41. The scheme will support government legislation to become a net zero contributor to greenhouse gases by 2050.

Due to the continued COVID-19 restrictions placed on public events, we are unable to hold a face to face public exhibition. Renewable Connections still wish to share our plans for Bubney Solar Farm with the local community. A project website has been set-up, **www.bubneysolarfarm.co.uk**, so please feel free to browse the website and use the 'contact us' page if you have any questions or wish to make a representation/suggestion.

About Us

Renewable Connections has been established by Armstrong Capital Management, one of the UK's leading renewable energy companies to help drive the decarbonisation of the UK economy by developing renewable energy projects. Our team has a successful track record of delivering well designed renewable energy schemes across the UK.



Aerial Site Location

Site Boundary

Where is the Proposed Solar Farm?

The site is located on land within Bubney Farm, Grindley Brook, Whitchurch, SY13 4QH. The site is situated within Shropshire Council. A planning application will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority.

Why Here?

The site has been carefully selected as part of a detailed feasibility process. Consideration has been given to, amongst other things; grid capacity, solar irradiation, environmental designations, cultural heritage, ecology/bi-diversity, flood risk and existing land use and quality. Technical studies and reports are still being conducted to inform the final design.

The main site is located within gently undulating arable farmland. The Historical Park and Garden to the west of the site has a similar topography and as such it is anticipated that the existing woodland belt provides adequate visual screening.

There are various Public Rights of Way (PRoW) traversing the site which will be retained and remain unaffected by the development. These constraints have been taken into consideration and appropriate offset will be provided into the layout design for this development site.

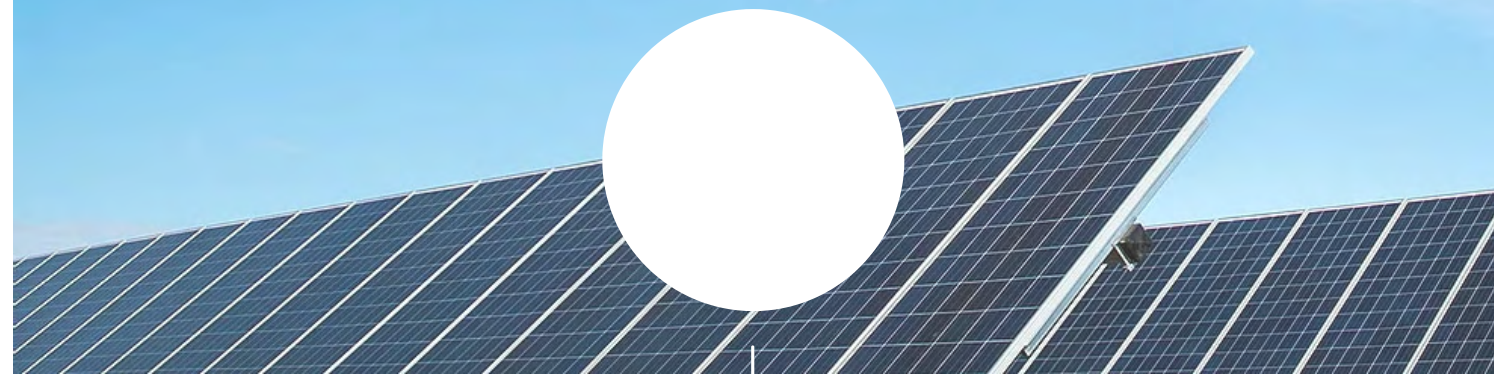
APPENDIX 2

Bubney Solar Farm Website

Bubney Solar Farm

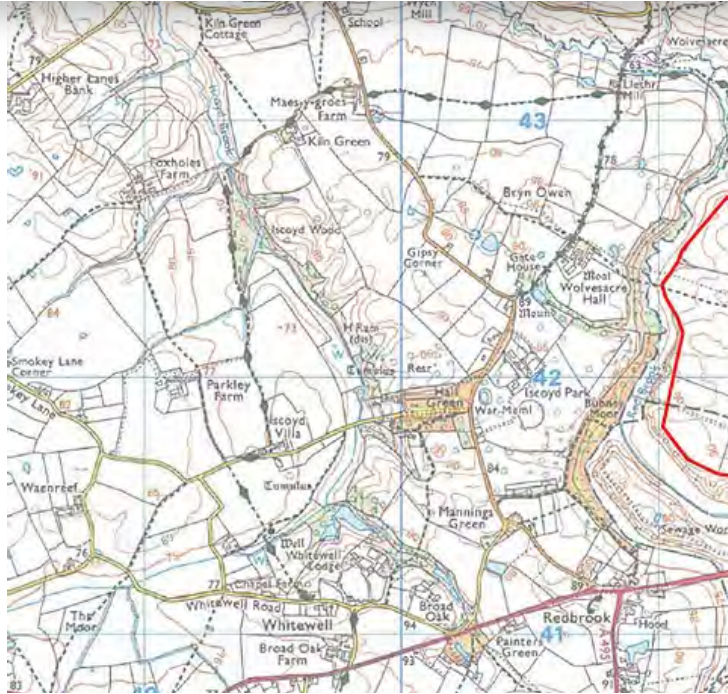
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Due to the unprecedented times we find ourselves in, we are unable to hold a face to face public consultation event. The COVID-19 pandemic is at the forefront of all decisions that we make, however, we still want to share with you our plans for Bubney Solar Farm. This website has been set-up to do just that, so please feel free to browse the website and use the 'contact us' page if you have any questions or wish to make a representation/suggestion.



Where is the Site?

The site is located on land within Bubney Farm, Grindley Brook, Whitchurch, SY13 4QH. The site is situated within Shropshire Council.



About Renewable Connections Development Limited

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[CONTACT US](#)

Why are Solar Farms Important?

The National Infrastructure Committee have advised the government that by 2030, a minimum of 50% of power should come from renewables. A climate change emergency was declared by Shropshire Council in May 2019. The Council resolved to acknowledge that there is a climate change emergency and pledged to make Shropshire carbon neutral by 2030. Shropshire Council adopted its Sustainable Strategy Framework in December 2019 which sets out how it will be carbon neutral by 2030 and promote adaption measures and increase the resilience of the Council's services.

Following the climate change emergency declaration in May 2019, the Council created a Climate Change Task Force reinforce an existing working group of key officers from across the Council. The Climate Change Strategy will enable Shropshire, through leadership from the Council and its partners, to strive towards a low carbon society, greener economy and a healthy, sustainable area.

In early 2020, the Council held a climate action workshop. Over 100 stakeholders from businesses and agricultural and community groups attended as well as members of Shropshire communities. Feedback and suggestions provided are playing a pivotal role in shaping Shropshire's future plans and the development of a wider climate action strategy. Shropshire Council are also working jointly with Telford & Wrekin Borough Council on the development of a Climate Action Partnership to help provide community leadership and help stakeholders across Shropshire to tackle the challenge of climate change.

The Committee on Climate Change Report June 2020 advises the following with regards to renewable energy:

'The power sector has been a major success story in the past decade. Emissions have decreased around 62% over the period 2008 – 2018 reflecting real decarbonisation of energy produced in the UK. The carbon intensity of the grid fell from around 500 gCO₂/kWh IN 2010 TO 246 gCO₂/kWh 2018. Electricity generated in from renewables was 25 TWh in 2008 (7% of mix) and rose to 100 TWh in 2018 (34%).

This has resulted in a transition from fossil fuel based power to renewables. For example, in Q3 2019, renewables provided more electricity than fossil fuels for the first time in the UK's history. This has wider importance when considering that electrification will increase demand for electricity over the coming decades.'



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Site Assessment

Agricultural Land Classification

The provisional Agricultural Land Classification map delineates the land as comprising Grade 2 land, as shown in the installation below. The site may comprise best and most versatile agricultural land. The Agricultural Land Classification maps are not accurate and therefore further site specific surveys will be done.

[Agricultural Land Classification Map](#)

Highways and Access

Access to the site will be an existing farm access track leading from the A41 at Grindley Brook. This is the main access point for the farmstead and is considered to be appropriate for agricultural vehicles and therefore HGVs.

During construction / installation of the solar farm, there would be trips associated with the delivery of materials to site and arrivals and departures of construction staff.

Construction material deliveries will mainly consist of small to medium HGVs while staff trips will mainly consist of vans.

During construction / installation of the solar farm, the proposals would generate an insignificant number of traffic movements along the local highway. A Construction Management Plan will be submitted to manage traffic.

Flood Risk

The site is in flood zone 1, as confirmed by the Environment Agency. Flood zone 1 has the least risk of flooding.

[Flood Risk Map](#)

Cultural Heritage

In terms of heritage, there are no designated heritage assets are recorded within the site. There are however 31 Listed Buildings, a Registered Historic Park and Garden, and one Scheduled Monument located within a 1km radius of the site. 16 Grade II Listed Buildings are directly associated with the early 18th Century Grade II* Listed Century Country House and Grade II Registered designated landscape of Iscoyd Park, c.550m west of the site. The Grade II Listed Lock House lies c.780m north-east of the site; the other Listed Buildings are located in the western and southern parts of the study area. The Scheduled Monument comprises the moat of the (now-demolished) medieval manor of Wolvesacre Hall, located a short distance to the north of Iscoyd Park, c.310m west of the site.

The proposed solar PV development would be visible to varying degrees between Bubney Farm to the north, Bridleway 0234/92/1 to the east, the sewerage treatment works to the south, and woodland at Bubney Moor to the West. The proposed solar PV development would be physically and visually separated from the Special Landscape Area at Wolvesacre Hall, Iscoyd Park and Kiln Green to the west due to the extent of Woodland at Bubney Moor. Overall, the screening will result in a low temporary impact on the setting of the site.

Landscape and Visual Impact

In order to understand the potential visibility of the solar PV development, a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping terrain model has been provided. This provides an indication of the extent and pattern of visibility assuming a height of 15m for woodland and 8m for buildings. The ZTV does not account for individual hedgerows, minor changes in landform, or seasonal variations in leaf coverage. The ZTV model is therefore a 'worst case scenario' based upon a maximum solar panel height of 3m above ground level. The actual extent and pattern visibility would be less than indicated on the enclosed ZTV.

In general terms, the proposed solar PV development would be visible to varying degrees between Bubney Farm to the north, Bridleway 0234/92/1 to the east, the sewerage treatment works to the south, and woodland at Bubney Moor to the west of the site. Close proximity views would be visible from the PROW crossing the site. Medium proximity views would be visible from Bubney Farm to the north, Canal Cottages to the east, and the Rising Sun Cottage near the sewerage treatment works to the south of the site. Long distance views would be limited although partially visible from public footpath 0234/88/1 following the farm track to Bubney Farm to the north east and limited points along Llangollen Canal towpath. These visual effects can be mitigation through provision of new native hedgerows or reinforcements along the site boundaries.

The site has been identified by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as within an area considered to be of local value in the hierarchy of landscape designations or of low status in terms of the requirement for landscape protection as advised within paragraph 171 of the NPPF. As such, the site would not constitute a valued landscape with regards to Framework paragraph 170a. At the detailed design stage, the developer will prepare the mitigation strategy, and this will include, amongst other things, an appropriate planting strategy.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Ecology and Biodiversity

There are no statutory environmental designations, as defined by the EIA regulations located within the site. At a local level, the site is surrounded by areas of high biodiversity value and connective corridors as defined by Shropshire Council. The site is located within the surroundings of the following environmental designations:

- There are no designated heritage assets are recorded within the site. There are however 31 Listed Buildings, a Registered Historic Park and Garden, and one Scheduled Monument located within a 1km radius of the site.
- Iscoyd Park comprising various Listed Buildings surrounding the Grade II* Listed Georgian country house;
- A belt of Ancient Woodland separates the site from the historical park and garden.

The site is located within the surroundings of the following environmental designations to the west of the site:

- Access Land at Bubney Moor and Hall Green;
- Special Landscape Area (Policy ECA3) at Wolvesacre Hall, Iscoyd Park and Kiln Green;
- Iscoyd Park Registered Park and Garden; and
- Scheduled Monument, Grade II and II* Listed Buildings located near Wolvesacre Hall and Iscoyd Park.
- The site is located within the surroundings of the following published Landscape Character Areas (LCAs):
 - Natural England, Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain (NCA 61); and
- Shropshire Council, Principal Timbered Farmlands (LCT).

It is considered that no statutory designated areas for nature conservation values are close enough to be directly affected by the proposed development. Further detailed ecological assessments would be required assess the impact of the scheme in full but, with an appropriate layout design, any identified features within the site could be retained and the enhancement of boundaries within the site could provide an on site ecological mitigation to off-set any possible loss of habitat.

In summary, it would not be expected that any impacts of greater than moderate-minor significance would be expected as a result of the proposal on any of the ecological receptors.

Environmental Designations Plan



[Home](#)

[Importance of Solar Farms](#)

[Site Assessment](#)

[Development Proposal](#)

[Contact](#)

Bristol, BS32 4QL



Development Proposal

The proposal is the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of a ground mounted solar farm with a maximum export capacity of 30MW with potential battery storage. The proposed development would, typically, have a life of up to 40 years at the end of which the modules would be decommissioned and removed from the site.

There will also be some electrical connection infrastructure. A grid connection route is proposed to the north east to connect the proposed solar PV development to the existing Whitchurch substation located on the A41. This includes a simple cable route through the fields along the track and onto the A41.

To utilise the network capacity fully, it is proposed that battery storage is included as a second phase of development, this will store surplus energy in order to provide help to the grid during peak consumer usage.

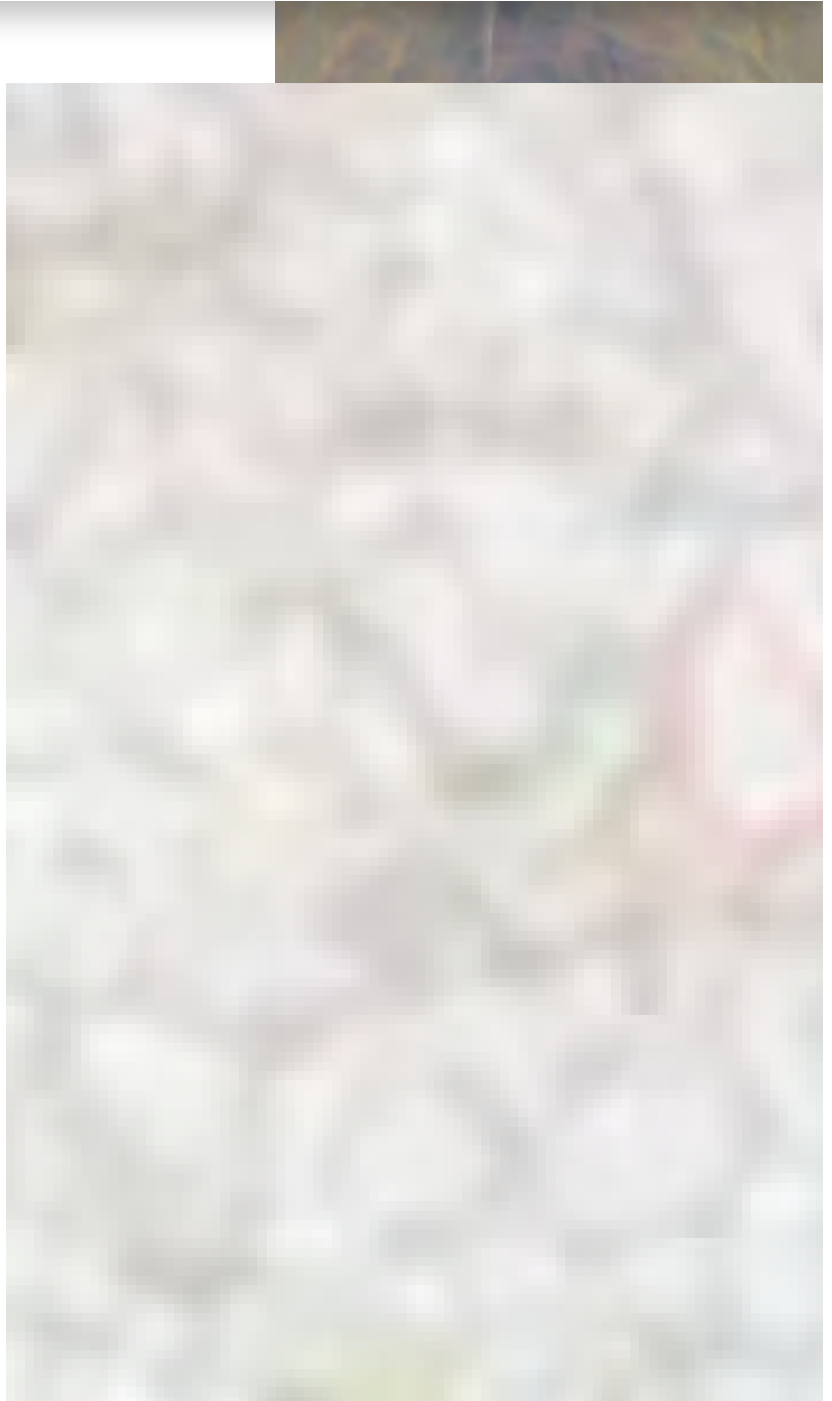
As a general design principle for the ground mounted solar, the layout will be based on a bifacial panels fixed onto a single tracker mounting systems. The top height of the panels is expected to be c. 3m. The metal framework that houses the modules will be supported at intervals by single mounted posts approximately 3.5m apart. The posts will be driven into the ground at an approximate depth of 2.5 m. The cabling would be concealed in trenches. The arrays would be set within a 2.0m high stock-proof fence. The distance between the proposed fencing and existing hedges would vary across the site and would typically be around 5m.

The application proposal would also include a package of landscape, ecological and biodiversity benefits that could include the installation of barn owl boxes, bird nesting boxes, beehives, log piles, restoration of traditional field boundaries, and other hibernacula such as small buried rubble piles suitable for reptile species, amphibians and insect life. Land between and beneath the panels can be used for biodiversity enhancements and seasonal grazing. Existing hedgerows surrounding the site would be bolstered with additional hedgerow and tree planting where

The benefits of Bubney Solar Farm

The main benefits of the development proposed are summarised below:

- The site would generate enough renewable power to supply the equivalent annual energy needs of more than 9,090 homes, making a significant contribution to local clean power and regional renewable targets.
- The scheme would displace 12,900 tonnes of CO₂ from equivalent fossil fuel generation over the lifespan of 40 years.
- The scheme would allow Shropshire to play its part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with local, national and international targets.
- The site will offer considerable biodiversity and landscape enhancements. Both will be carefully managed with a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan.
- The site can still be used for grazing throughout the operation of the solar farm and can be returned to its original agricultural use following decommissioning.







Next Steps

Pre-application engagement with the Local Planning Authorities is underway. Renewable Connections Developments Limited have submitted an EIA Screening Opinion Request to Shropshire Council. Subject to community feedback, a planning application will be submitted in the late summer of 2020.

Contact & Feedback

We welcome all feedback from the community on our draft proposals. The feedback can be provided in the text box below. Please provide your full name and contact details when using this method of submission. You can also submit comments by email or post using the details provided.

Comments provided by the local community will be taken into account in shaping the final planning application submission. All comments must be provided by **5pm on Friday 4th September**.



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CONTACT US

APPENDIX 3

Consultation Website Statistics

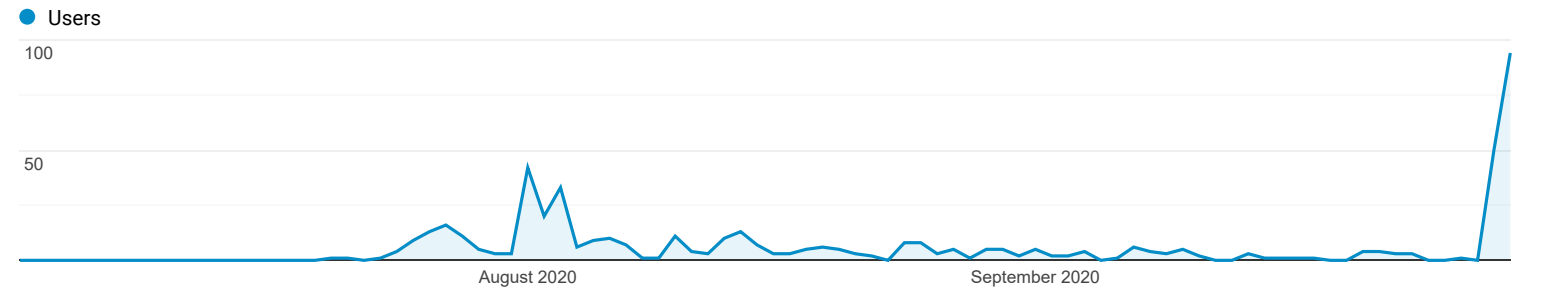
Audience Overview



All Users
100.00% Users

1 Jul 2020 - 30 Sept 2020

Overview



Users
410

New Users
410

Sessions
582

Number of Sessions per User
1.42

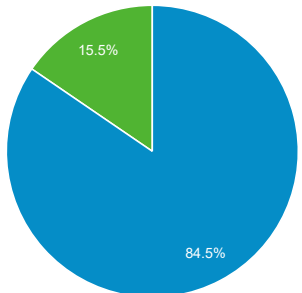
Page Views
1,082

Pages/Session
1.86

Avg. Session Duration
00:02:13

Bounce Rate
65.64%

New Visitor
Returning Visitor



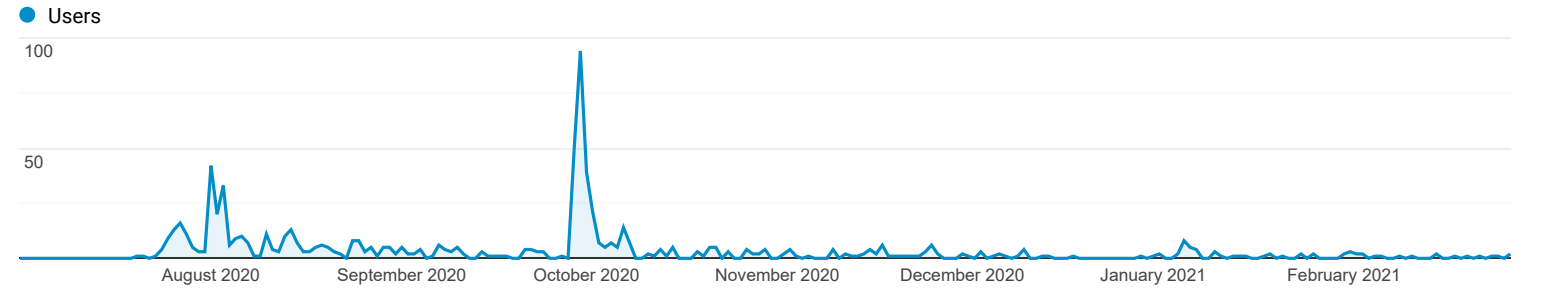
Language		Users	% Users
1.	en-gb	338	82.24%
2.	en-us	57	13.87%
3.	en	7	1.70%
4.	es-es	6	1.46%
5.	cy	1	0.24%
6.	en-au	1	0.24%
7.	en-hk	1	0.24%

Audience Overview

All Users
100.00% Users

1 Jul 2020 - 28 Feb 2021

Overview



Users
622

New Users
622

Sessions
904

Number of Sessions per User
1.45

Page Views
1,733

Pages/Session
1.92

Avg. Session Duration
00:02:13

Bounce Rate
64.27%

New Visitor

Returning Visitor

14.2%

85.8%

Language		Users	% Users
1.	en-gb	468	75.12%
2.	en-us	128	20.55%
3.	es-es	11	1.77%
4.	en	10	1.61%
5.	en-hk	2	0.32%
6.	cy	1	0.16%
7.	de	1	0.16%
8.	en-au	1	0.16%
9.	es	1	0.16%



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DESIGN



ENVIRONMENT



PLANNING



ECONOMICS



HERITAGE