



Academy of Light solar development | Frequently asked questions

The purpose of these FAQs is to provide a non-technical response to questions that have been identified throughout the consultation period.

1. What are Sunderland Association Football Club proposing?

The proposed development will comprise a photovoltaic array (solar farm) of up to 40MW (DC Peak) export, associate infrastructure and habitat and wetland enhancements.

2. Why do you want to create solar farms in this location?

The area next to the academy is well suited to conversion to solar farms. We have carried out an extensive review of all of the alternatives before deciding that the establishment of a solar farm represented the best option financially and environmentally. It also presents a positive opportunity for the Club to contribute to the country's energy security and transition to a low carbon economy. The UK has a target of reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and electricity generating via solar is a key element of delivering on this commitment.

3. How does it fit into the long-term strategy of the Football Club?

The Football Club recently unveiled a new sustainability strategy to reduce its impact on the environment and support the UK's low carbon ambitions. The plan is in line with the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals, focusing on SAFC's role as a Football Club in the local and regional communities and the impact it can have to support environmental change and energy usage. It is the Club's ambition to be energy self-sufficient from renewable sources by 2028 while also providing energy to the National Grid network for the benefit of the wider community. This is at the heart of the new sustainability plan with proposals to generate affordable clean power and contribute to the UK's energy security. All Football Clubs are having to consider their carbon footprint and Sunderland are no different. We have a unique opportunity to support our region reducing the dependence on fossil fuels. This will accelerate the area covered by South Tyneside becoming carbon neutral. Alongside this commitment is a strategy to maximise the potential revenue opportunities to become financially sustainable while maximising the investment in the playing squad. We own land next to the academy that is worth far more as a solar farm than as agricultural land. It therefore made sense for us to explore the best means of adding to our revenue streams to ultimately invest more on the pitch. The land will remain designated as green belt and will be reinstated for agricultural use at the end of the solar farm's 30-year lifespan.

4. What impact will the solar farm have on the local environment and wildlife?

The Club recognise the importance of environmental protection and betterment as a key part of sustainable responsibility. A comprehensive ecological appraisal has been undertaken by an independent qualified ecological to establish habitats and species on site and mitigation measures will be provided as part of the proposed development in order to reduce any potential impacts. Biodiversity net gain calculations have been undertaken by which has determined that the proposed development will result in a net increase in biodiversity for the site, through mitigatory planting and natural hedgerow reinstatement, improving the environment for local wildlife. Through habitat creation and enhancement detailed within the Landscape Plan, the Development will deliver an overall net gain of 80.54%, a gain in hedgerow units of 39.79% and a watercourse unit net gain of 17.24%. This exceeds the statutory requirement of a minimum provision of 10% biodiversity net gain as set out in the Environment Act 2021 and provides site-specific ecological enhancements.



Statutory protected species surveys were also undertaken, including a bat survey, great crested newt survey, and badger survey, mitigation measures can be found in the EclA Report. Mitigations such as Root Protection Areas for trees during the construction period, boundary habitats are maintained with a 10m easement of the Development, and pre-construction ecological walk overs to ensure the protection of wildlife onsite.

5. Isn't this site in the greenbelt/a greenfield site?

The site is located within the greenbelt, however, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) notes that renewable energy developments can proceed in the greenbelt, subject to demonstrating very special circumstances. The planning statement that accompanies the application for the proposed development will set out those special circumstances for consideration by South Tyneside Council. The proposed development is not permanent to ensure that the land can be reused for agricultural purposes.

6. Will this impact on agricultural land?

An agricultural land classification (ALC) survey has been undertaken and has been submitted as part of the documents to support the planning application for the Proposed Development. The ALC survey has found that over 80% of the two development parcels are considered to be grade 3B which is not best and most versatile agricultural land.

The overall site area of the Proposed Development is 48.2ha, it is considered that this will not have a significant impact on food production in South Tyneside and the surrounding area.

7. What will happen at the end of the solar farm's lifespan?

After 30 years, the site will be returned to being solely used for agricultural purposes. The components of the solar panels after decommissioning will be sent to a commercial solar farm recycling company, of which there is currently one in the UK with further companies expected to be offering the same service at the end of the 30-year life span of the development. This ensures complete sustainability as the panels can be further used as recycled parts long after they have produced a large potential capacity of solar energy.

8. Will the panels be visible from where I live?

Elements of the proposed development will be visible from nearby areas, however, mitigatory planting will be implemented to screen the development from neighbouring properties. A landscaping strategy has been developed to provide an appropriate level of mitigation from a landscape and visual perspective. The development will feature an 'east-west' layout for the solar panels standing at a maximum height of 1.8m. Previously, many solar farms were south facing. However, having panels facing this direction offers peaks of energy generation, while an 'east-west' formation generates more consistent energy generation throughout the day, albeit at a lower peak level. The solar farm layout allows a lower height of the infrastructure reducing its potential impact on the receiving landscape.



9. I'm concerned about glint and glare; will this be an issue?

Careful consideration has been given to the siting of the solar panels to reduce the impacts on residential amenity, road users, and rail and aviation safeguarding. A glint and glare assessment has been undertaken as part of the planning application and demonstrates that there will be no issues associated with the proposed development.

10. How will the solar farms be protected from the roadside – will you be building fences or walls around the fields?

It is envisaged that a 'v mesh' security fencing will be installed around the solar panels for security purposes, but enhanced hedgerow planting will both screen and protect the proposed development from the roadside. The installation of 'v mesh' fencing is considered not as visually intrusive as other forms of fencing to preserve the openness of the location.

11. How will the site be accessed?

It is proposed that the site will be accessed infrequently via existing farm accesses off Moor Lane, which will be upgraded to allow construction traffic to access the site. Once completed the solar farm will only require approximately two visits per year for maintenance purposes.

12. What measures will be in place to keep the site secure?

The proposed 'v mesh' security fencing will be installed around the solar panels for security purposes, with access to the solar panels via secured gates. There will also be remote monitored CCTV cameras installed on the site at a height of approximately three metres.

13. Will it generate any noise?

Once built, there is very little noise from a solar development. The predicted noise of a solar development is considered to be low to negligible, therefore, no specific mitigation is usually considered. A project specific Noise Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of the planning submission, which evaluated noise impacts associated with the Proposed Development. Mitigation measures were identified, such as an exclusion zone of string converters 40m from the residential boundary, with further localised screening for string converters 100m from the residential boundary, to reduce the potential for noise impacts. This ensures that residents, walkers, and wildlife will not be affected by noise pollution.

14. What disruption will the construction cause?

Construction related impacts are considered to be low and disruption will be minimised and controlled through the provision of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), which will be conditioned to any planning approval for the proposed development. The CEMP is a document that is agreed with South Tyneside Council and will control elements of the construction such as construction traffic routing and construction hours. This will have to be agreed with the local authority before works can commence on site.



15. Will footpaths be impacted as a result of the proposed development?

The Public Right of Way will be retained, and additional planting will be provided around the edges of the site will enhance the PRoW that runs along the western boundary of the western development parcel. Informal routes will be accessible on the eastern development parcel with access to the network of ponds / wetlands still available. As such, it is not anticipated that there will be an impact on walkers as a result of the Proposed Development. Enhanced landscape mitigation and planting will screen the proposed development so the perception of loss of green space will be minimised.

16. Who will look after the solar farms once they are completed?

The construction and operation, and maintenance of the Solar Farm will be subject to a competitive bidding process once we get planning permission.

17. Can solar panels affect health?

Solar farms are not known to pose any danger to neighboring residents or communities whatsoever and there is no confirmed research showing that photovoltaic systems affect human health. Unlike fossil fuels they do not release emissions into the atmosphere so there is no impact from emission on human health. Replacing fossil fuel power stations with renewable energy alternatives like solar and wind farms means there will be less emissions from fossil fuels in the atmosphere in the longer term, which is good for people's health and the health of the environment. In relation to the construction phase of the development, potential impacts on residential amenity such as noise disturbance will be carefully controlled through the implementation of the CEMP.

18. Will you be using local contractors?

The construction and operation, and maintenance of the Solar Farm will be subject to a competitive bidding process once we get planning permission and grid connection date.

19. How will the energy be used?

It is currently proposed that the electricity produced by the solar panels will enter the National Grid system rather than a local distribution network. A grid connection has been secured with Northern PowerGrid. Sunderland AFC are also considering the option of providing 100% renewable electricity to a major manufacturing facility in the local area with the electricity being distributed via a private wire connection. Solar is now one of the lowest cost forms of new, large-scale electricity generation in the UK designed to ensure our energy security and contribute to controlling energy bills.