An energy park in our region of Somerset?



There is currently a proposal by the Somerset Energy Park Limited to develop a substantial photovoltaic ((PV) generating station with a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) east of the M5 motorway in the vicinity of Mark Village.

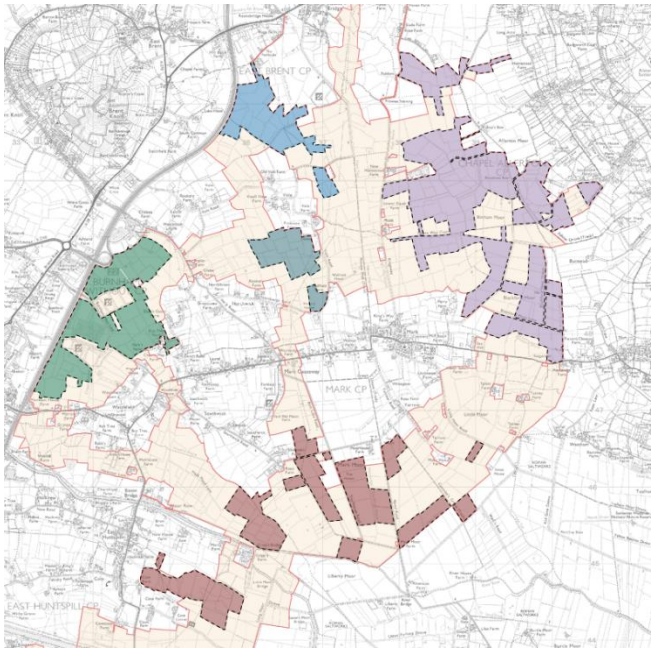
Somerset Energy Park Limited is a subsidiary of a company called Low Carbon Limited.

The project is still in the very early stage and an application to the Government's Planning Inspectorate is expected to be made in October 2027. We are currently in the pre-application stage and the Energy Park Project Launch is seeking local feedback to judge the likely response from the community in this area.

A considerable amount of thought has already gone into the project and Low Carbon Ltd have already produced documents that describe what is proposed in detail. An online website with information is available at the following address:

Somerset Energy Park | Low Carbon

An outline map of the areas where the PV arrays could be sited has been produced.



A more detailed image can be viewed by downloading the full pdf at the address below.

The information will naturally be of most interest to those living in the villages of Mark, Brent, Chapel Allerton and Burnham Without.

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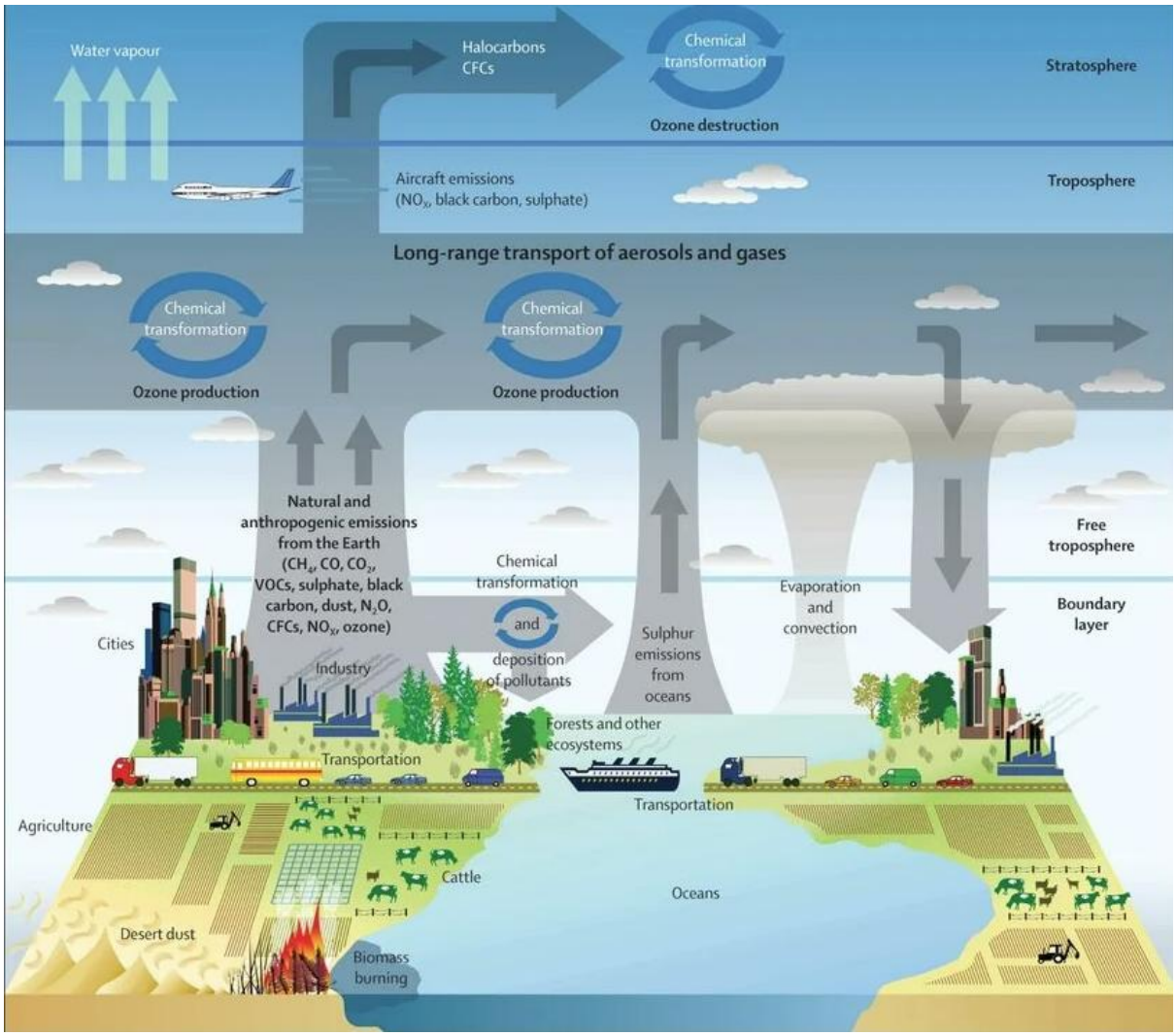
To access the Low Carbon Ltd feedback form, follow this link:
Feedback | Somerset Energy Park

The world view

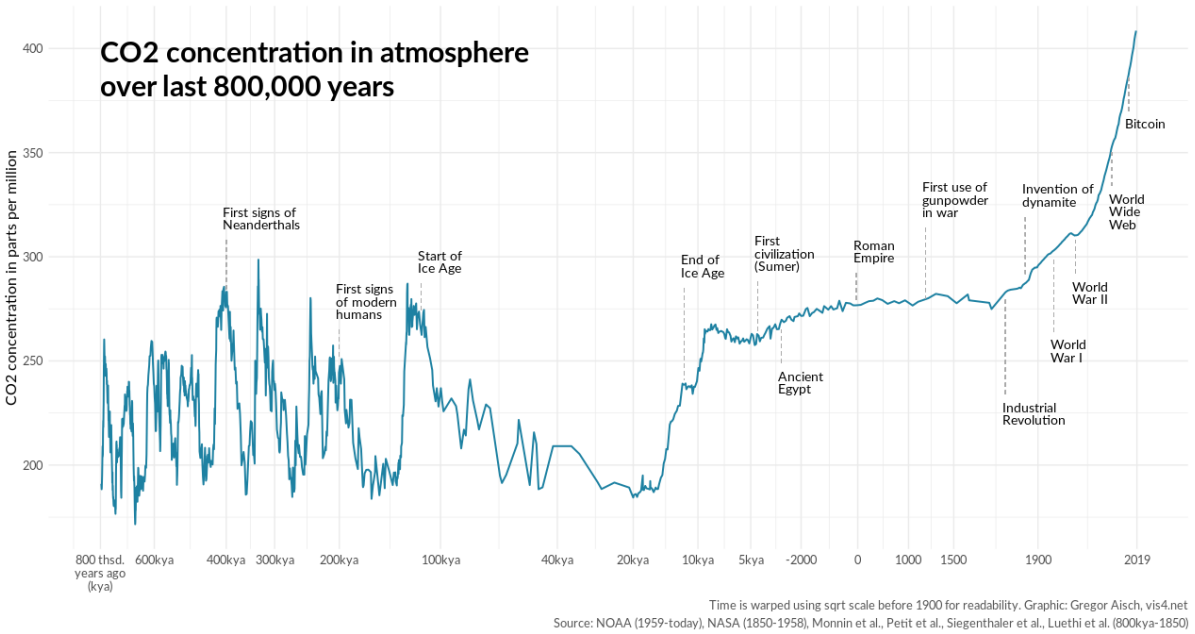
Since 1900 technology has transformed our world and polluted our atmosphere.



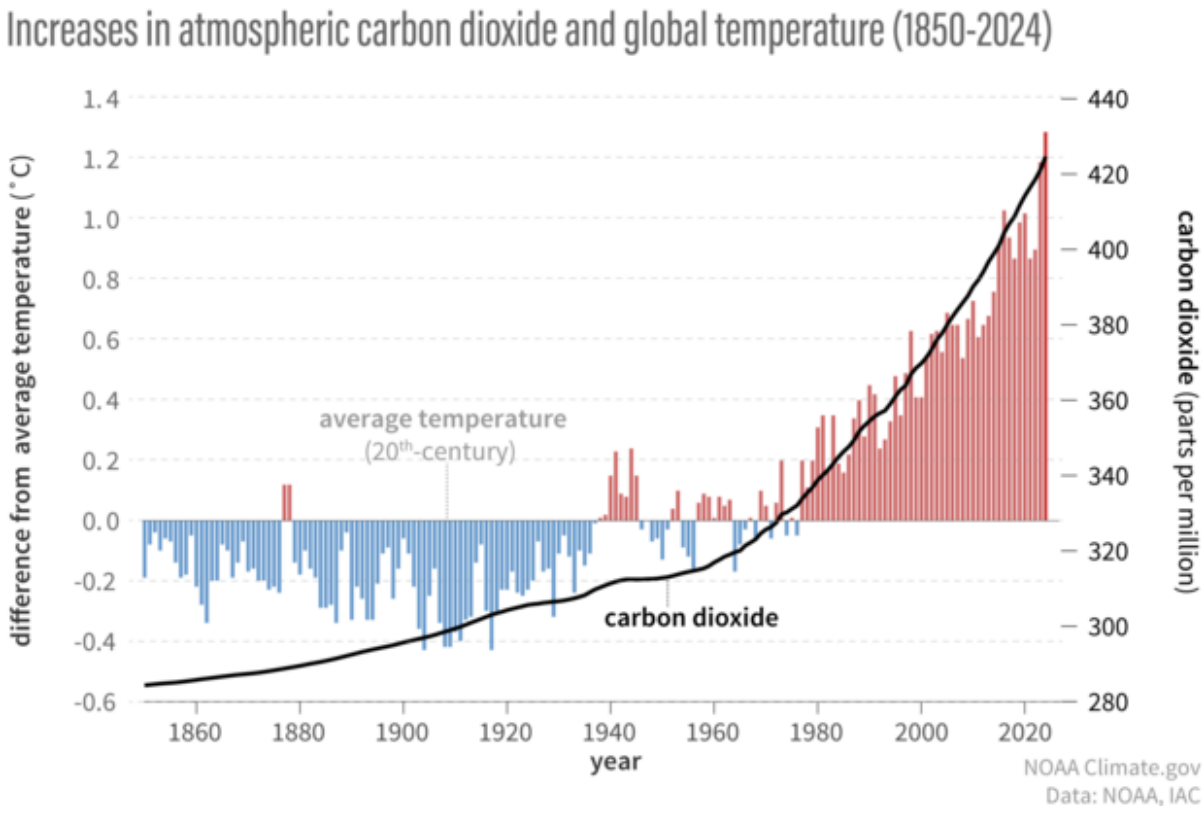
Atmospheric pollutants are harmful gases, liquids, or solid particles, such as sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, ozone, hydrocarbons, and carbon particulate matter. They contaminate the troposphere and stratosphere, causing health problems and environmental damage.

It is undeniable that the climate is an extremely complicated system with many factors that we still do not quite understand. Moreover, the further we look back, the more uncertainty there is around the data. Robust evidence is available for the last 800,000 years, thanks to ice cores providing high-resolution records in the form of air bubbles trapped under the freezing snow.

The time lag between CO2 emission and their pollution and warming effect is around 50 years, so whatever changes we observe now are only the tip of the iceberg. The following chart is a dramatic representation of the problem that humanity must now face.



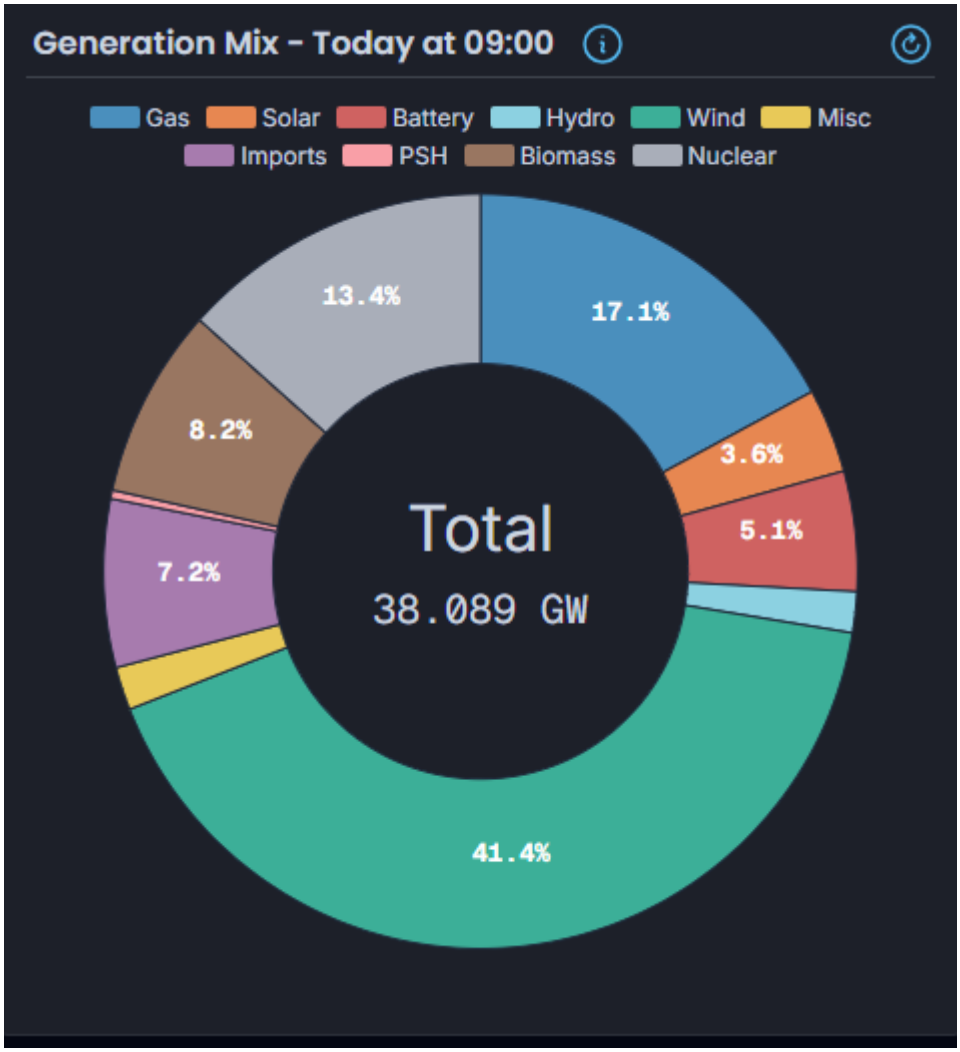
Even the most determined climate change sceptic has to find an alternative explanation for the effect that rises in atmospheric carbon dioxide have on global temperature.



Modern 21st century technology offers a partial solution but it will also change our landscape. Decarbonisation of our energy industries involves the use of nuclear, photovoltaic, wind, geothermal, hydro and tidal power. In the UK, much of our abundant wind resource is now being harvested through the use of offshore wind farms.

A reinvigorated nuclear industry will replace our ageing reactors with newer versions to provide a stable baseload of electricity, which will not fluctuate with the elements.

A glance at the real time energy dashboard in the mid-morning on a dull day reveals the size of the contribution that renewables are already making to our national energy supply. Wind power is now significant but when the skies clear the PV input may rise to around 20% or more on a good day. That proportion is set to increase as new PV energy farms appear around the UK.



Gathering light energy from the sun necessitates a huge investment in solar panels and coverage of land which has previously been cleared for agriculture. Advances in battery storage complement the new power source, providing a smooth release of energy when the solar input fluctuates. Periodic calm and cloudy periods will still require gas power generation for the foreseeable future.

This proposal will test our environmental consciences in different ways. Man made climate change is a real phenomenon. Although the development proposals are not directly affecting Lympsham and Eastertown, the sites under consideration are very much in our “backyard” and we may reasonably take time to consider the matter.

Energy Parks.

Energy parks are integrated hubs that co-locate clean energy generation (such as solar and wind), storage systems (like batteries or hydrogen), and large energy users (data centres or manufacturers) at a single grid interconnection point. They provide faster, cheaper access to clean power and help meet rising electricity demand efficiently.

The image at the beginning of this article is one of the PV arrays in Marksbury, Wiltshire. B&NES Council approved a planning application in 2014 for a solar PV farm at Marksbury, just to the west of Bath. It has been developed by AlphaReal and European Energy to supply 22.3 GWh a year for the next decade to the National Grid by a Virtual Power Purchasing Agreement (VPPA).

Island Green Power is pressing for a 500 Megawatt solar farm across 3000 aces in North Wiltshire and campaign groups such as “Stop Lime Down” are working to delay or change the plans. Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) wants to build the Botley West Solar Farm across more than 2,000 acres of land to the north and west of Oxford and they have been met with similar opposition.

Similar projects are evolving in many other regions and the debate between those who wish to preserve the countryside from PV developments and those who see such projects as a necessary step towards reducing the world’s dependence on fossil fuels is sharpening. The debate over the wisdom of expanding PV generation is currently being held in Parliament, as we can see from Hansard. The arguments can be viewed by following this link:

Solar Farms - Hansard - UK Parliament

Agrivoltaic farming.



One of the biggest concerns that change of land use raises is the potential loss of large swathes of agricultural land. The UK produces around 57-60% of our own food with imports primarily from Europe (23-25%) .

We mainly produce a significant share of cereals, meats, dairy produce and eggs. Our fruits, vegetables and certain other food come increasingly from abroad.

Agrivoltaic (APV) farming (also called agrivoltaics or dual-use solar) is the practice of combining solar photovoltaic panels with agricultural production on the same land. It should allow farmers to generate both electricity and crops or livestock income simultaneously. Its proponents argue that it improves land-use efficiency, can enhance crop microclimates, and provides farmers with diversified revenue streams.

Solar farms require a lot of space, which in some countries is in short supply. In the UK for example, over 70% of land is already farmland, which doesn't leave much room for solar farms. Additionally, not all crops are suited to growing in such conditions.

There are currently a number of studies in progress to determine how successful agrivoltaic farming can be in the UK. It is claimed that the potential for agriculture under existing PV farms in the UK is significant, with studies indicating that agrivoltaics can meet UK electricity demand more than four times over, without losing farmland.

The UK government's Solar Roadmap targets 45-47GW of solar by 2030, and agrivoltaics is recognized as a distinct category that allows for dual-use of land, treating the land's primary use as a material consideration in planning assessments. This approach not only supports the energy transition targets but also aligns with the UK's commitment to maintaining agricultural land.

Rural Aesthetics

Perhaps the most immediate concern for residents in areas where energy parks are being proposed, is the likely impact of the infrastructure upon the visual amenity. The visual impact plays a major role in how people perceive solar farms. It shapes opinions about integrating solar energy into our landscapes and communities.

Larger solar farms covering many acres catch more attention than smaller arrays on rooftops or small lots. Flat open fields, rolling hills, or dense forests each frame solar farms differently, affecting visibility and contrast. Trees, shrubs, or berms serve as natural buffers to soften solar farms' visibility. Low-profile mounting and non-reflective panel surfaces helps panels blend with surroundings but may also reduce the ease of agriculture beneath the arrays.

Studies reveal varied results on solar farms' effects on property values and affected communities often express a mix of enthusiasm and worries about nearby solar installations. Planting native trees and shrubs around the perimeter creates natural buffers that blend with local ecosystems.

Biodiversity

According to the Wildlife Trust, the expansion of solar farms in the UK has led to increased interest in the interactions between solar farms and wildlife. While evidence of the impacts of solar farms on biodiversity is limited, particularly in the UK context, well-managed solar farms can support significantly greater biodiversity than the intensive arable farmland they often replace.

Sites managed with wildflower meadows, hedgerows, and minimal disturbance have recorded up to three times more birds and four times more bumblebees than surrounding agricultural land. The UK planning law now requires all major developments, including solar farms, to deliver a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain.



Many solar projects exceed this substantially, with some achieving gains over 100%. The 25-30 year operational lifespan of solar farms provides a rare opportunity for long-term habitat restoration, with land left largely undisturbed and free from pesticides, fertilisers, and ploughing throughout the site's operation.

How do you feel about the proposals?

Before the debate becomes more widespread, it may help to take a pause to think about the benefits and losses associated the changes in land use. Our nation has changed substantially over the last 300 years and the current climate changes are going to alter our landscape, whatever else we decide to do next.

Please follow some of the links to the documents I have cited below and perhaps complete the Low Carbon questionnaire online.

Peter Smith
Eastertown
October 2026

Live GB Electricity Generation Mix, Carbon & Price – Energy Dashboard
Feedback | Somerset Energy Park
Somerset Energy Park | Low Carbon
134a344a88ee4bfa27dfd20e7657a7072612d6d6.pdf
Somerset Energy Park - Project information
Energy Parks: A New Strategy To Meet Rising Electricity Demand • Energy Innovation
Solar Farms - Hansard - UK Parliament
Agrivoltaic Farming | Is It Worth It?
The technical and economic potential for crop based agrivoltaics in the United Kingdom - ScienceDirect
What Is The Visual Impact Of Solar Farms? Exploring Beauty, Concerns, And Smart Design Strategies
Impacts of ground mounted solar on biodiversity - Literature Review