

Visit to WSC Solar Array at Toggam Farm, 04 June 2024

This visit was arranged by the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership on behalf of the Community Network to provide members of the network the opportunity to hear about the history of the facility and how the electricity generated is used.

It was hosted by Andy Oswald of West Suffolk Council who own the facility, and the lead for our visit was Thomas Clayton of Greenheath Asset Management Ltd. who manage the site on behalf of WSC. A total of 8 of us attended.



The solar farm was purchased by WSC in 2016 as a complete working solar farm, significantly de-risking the project on the part of the council, and commenced operating as a WSC solar array in 2016. The land itself is still owned by Greenheath, but leased to WSC. The total capacity of the solar farm is 12.4 MW, which is sufficient to generate the equivalent of about 3 times the electrical demand of WSC as an organisation.

The land occupied by the solar array is a former maggot farm, a history that precluded many other agricultural uses due to the potential for contamination of the soil, hence planning permission granted for the construction of the solar farm. The former use of the land continues to leave its legacy in the name of the site, the word Toggam being an anadrome of the word Maggot.

Work was undertaken with the University of Cambridge at the time, to look at balancing the needs of the solar array with those of biodiversity. Owing to the difficulties of maintaining lines of sight in a large solar array such as this, which would make monitoring of the welfare of livestock problematic, grazing of the ground beneath the array is no longer carried out at this site.

The array contains 346 inverters converting DC to AC, each serving 126 to 130 panels. The inverters are air-cooled to minimise moving parts which in turn minimises the need for maintenance as well as minimising any noise. A 20 MW cable was installed at the time of construction to future-proof the site for the possibility of increasing the generating capacity at a future juncture.

The public ownership aspect of the facility, with the payback from the generation of the power contributing to the financial well-being of WSC as a provider of local public services, is felt to be an asset towards ensuring support for the facility in the local community. The site is well insulated, in terms of visibility of the facility and any potential impacts from noise or activity, from its neighbours and our host advised that the solar farm continues to maintain a good relationship with the local community.

<https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/environment/climate-change/toggam-solar-farm.cfm>

