

Putting Solar panels in the right place!

Graham Campbell, Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, explains how best to capture energy from the sun

The energy crisis and the Ukraine war have focused our attention on the urgency to develop renewable energy like never before. Solar energy, with wind, is the future of course, but do we really need to cover our finest landscapes and most valuable agricultural land with solar farms? Of course not. That would be madness. We need every bit of our precious land to produce more food for a growing population, and we must protect our biodiversity.

We have vast areas of tarmac in car parks plus unused roofs just waiting to absorb the sun's energy. These are the opportunities we need to act on with urgency. We are delighted to report that our County Council is leading the way with the solar park under construction over the parked cars at the St Ives Park and Ride Busway car park. This has the added bonus of keeping the cars cool in summer. But it is also common sense that no new building should be constructed anywhere without a legal requirement to make full use of its roof area to capture solar energy. This really ought to have been a building regulation for the last 20 years, and so we have a lot of catching up to do.

The opportunities are huge. New technology means that whole roofs, from ridge to gutter, can be generating power. Installing isolated solar panels on traditional tiled roofs may become a thing of the past. There is a whole new architecture waiting to be exploited. We must look at roofs not just as a means to keep out the weather, but also as the main source of our energy needs. Combine this with a serious commitment to vastly improve the thermal insulation of our existing buildings and we will have a bright future.



St Ives Park & Ride car park solar panels under construction. A complete solar panel roof. Credit Photo GB-Sol Ltd
Credit Ian Jackson

The Great Ouse Valley Trust is a champion of our precious landscape and biodiversity. The Trust will oppose all solar farms on green areas while there are huge tarmac areas and roofs just waiting to absorb the sun's energy. Well done to the County Council for showing how it can be done, but this is just the start. Now we need to look at every part of our built-up areas to find other opportunities to tap the sun's natural power.

The Great Ouse Valley Trust promotes for public benefit the conservation, restoration and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire. For more information about the Trust please visit www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk

