

Cabinet

11 November 2025

Weymouth 2040: - Renewable Energy Partnership For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr R Biggs, Property & Assets and Economic Growth

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Dorset Council is leading a bold transition towards clean energy. This ambition is underpinned by our Council Plan, whose central vision is '*Working together to create a fairer, more prosperous and more sustainable Dorset for current and future generations*', and which establishes climate and nature as one of its four core priorities – including a target of achieving a net zero county by 2045 and a net zero council by 2035. Clean energy also forms the heart of our climate strategy and our economy strategy, Energising Dorset, in central recognition of clean energy's significant potential to unlock investment, jobs and economic growth for Dorset.
- 1.2 The Council is also spearheading the Dorset Clean Energy Super Cluster, a transformative initiative based on Portland that integrates offshore wind, hydrogen, and carbon capture technologies, aiming to attract significant investment and create thousands of jobs. Despite challenges like grid limitations and planning constraints, Dorset is leveraging its rich natural resources and innovative partnerships to become a national leader in sustainable energy and climate resilience.
- 1.3 This report proposes a strategic collaboration between a UK-based renewable energy project developer, Source Galileo, and Dorset Council to shape a transformational and innovative approach to advance the development of onshore renewable and clean energy projects on council-owned land and property.

- 1.4 Source Galileo has proposed a strategic partnership with Dorset Council to accelerate the development of onshore renewable energy projects on Council-owned land and property. This collaboration, summarised in a proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), aims to support Dorset's climate goals by identifying and developing sites suitable for solar PV and other clean technologies. Under the proposed MoU, the developer would lead site assessments at its own cost, assume full financial risk for development, and secure viable land for significant time periods on market-standard option for lease/lease terms. Dorset Council would provide timely data and advice and explore long-term corporate power purchase agreements (CPPAs) to secure stable, low-carbon energy. The proposed partnership also includes joint efforts to secure grid connections, access innovation funding, and ensure responsive communication. Together, the parties aim to deliver transformative energy infrastructure that aligns with Dorset's net-zero ambitions and maximizes local benefits for Weymouth regeneration. The proposed project at Higher South Buckland farm is an anchor project and the collaboration will look at other Council assets, such as car parks for future opportunities. This will not be an exclusive collaboration, and the Council will have the ability to deal with other parties until binding agreements are in place for any specific land parcel.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

2.1 **Higher South Buckland Farm, Renewable Energy Project**

That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Assets, Property and Economic Development and Corporate Director Finance & Commercial (s151 Officer) interim to:

- Progress the Solar PV opportunity at Higher South Buckland Farm.
- Work with SSEN to secure a grid connection to enable future deployment.
- Enter a strategic partnership with Source Galileo to advance the project, including signing exclusive land agreements on standard market-terms.

The project supports Dorset Council's net zero goals and offers early delivery potential, directly contributing to the intersecting clean energy and Weymouth regeneration ambitions of the Council Plan and our climate and economy strategies.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 Advance the Higher South Buckland Farm, Solar PV by entering into an MOU and subsequent contractual agreements with Source Galileo to advance this renewable energy project. The County Farm presents a strategic opportunity for renewable energy deployment. Supporting Source Galileo in securing grid access and site exclusivity will enable Dorset Council to move forward with a 50MW solar PV project on council land. This supports the Council's net zero goals and offers a quicker win in the regeneration programme.

4. **Source Galileo**

- 4.1 Source Galileo is a UK-headquartered renewable energy developer specialising in large-scale renewable energy projects across the UK, Ireland, and Norway. The company is developing PV and battery storage projects in the UK and is also active in offshore wind development. Source Galileo is funded by Galileo Green Energy, a European developer with operations in 10 countries and over 200 employees in its group.

5. **County Farm Site Overview - Higher South Buckland Farm**

- 5.1 County Farm, Chickerell is part of the Dorset Council County Farms Estate, a publicly owned portfolio of 41 farms covering approximately 2,600 hectares across the county. These farms are managed to support agricultural development, provide opportunities for new entrants into farming, and contribute to the rural economy and landscape stewardship.

Repurposing the farm for solar energy generation supports key objectives within the Farms Estate Strategy 2026–2036 as follows:

- Environmental Improvement (Section 6.4): Solar development contributes to carbon emission reduction and climate resilience, directly supporting the Council's climate and nature crisis response.
- Renewable Energy Opportunities (Section 6.4.7): Aligns with the strategy's ambition to pilot low-carbon technologies and develop best practice models for energy generation on farms.
- Asset Categorisation (Section 6.3.4): Enables productive use of assets deemed unsuitable for farming, delivering public value through alternative uses such as renewable energy.
- Strategic Asset Management Plan (Section 5.2): Reflects the Council's commitment to optimising asset use for ecological and financial return, in line with broader corporate priorities.

This approach enhances the sustainability of the Farms Estate while supporting Dorset Council's wider environmental and economic goals.

- 5.2 Located near the town of Chickerell, in West Dorset, County Farm comprises predominantly Grade 3 and Grade 4 agricultural land. The site features gently sloping terrain with a south-facing aspect, making it well-suited for solar energy generation. It is bordered by hedgerows and contains a mix of open fields, farm buildings, and overhead electricity infrastructure. A small portion of the land is designated as flood risk area, and parts of the site intersect with a public right of way and a Landscape Protection Area.
- 5.3. The site is already identified as a solar PV opportunity area within the Dorset Council Local Plan Options Consultation: Opportunity areas for renewable energy. Our draft Farms Estate Strategy recognises the energy generation potential of the estate, and a funding bid has recently been submitted to the SW Net Zero Hub to further appraise feasibility on the wider estate – building upon an earlier high-level solar PV options assessment for the estate which

identified the potential at the Higher South Buckland site. This project therefore meshes with this wider feasibility work, acting as an anchor project that could serve to enrich our understanding of opportunities for progression on the wider estate.

- 5.4 Chickerell itself lies just west of Weymouth and is part of the South Dorset parliamentary constituency. The area has seen significant development in recent years and is home to existing energy infrastructure, including a small solar farm and a 45 MW gas power station at the Chickerell Substation, where a globally significant 2.4 GWh battery storage facility is approved for 2028.
- 5.5 The site's proximity to existing renewable energy developments, such as Newlands Solar Farm and Notting Lane Solar Farm, and its relative closeness to the Chickerell Grid Supply Point (GSP), make it a strategically attractive location for a solar PV-led project. The Chickerell substation is currently undergoing upgrade works funded through a £20m investment by SSEN to enhance its resilience and capacity.
- 5.6 The lease on the farm has ended but the tenancy automatically continues (under statute) until either party serves notice to terminate the tenancy - which neither party has done to date. Assets and Property receive an income of £16,920 for the lease of the farm.
- 5.7 If we want to terminate the tenancy, by law we need to give at least 12 months' notice, which must expire on the term date (which is 24 March in any year).

6. **The Proposal – Higher South Buckland Farm**

- 6.1 The Higher South Buckland Farm Renewable Energy Project is a large-scale solar energy installation proposed on Dorset Council owned farmland. Physically, the project will consist of:

Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Installation

- Up to 50 MWp of solar panels will be installed across the site.
- These panels will be mounted on metal frames, likely in rows aligned to maximise exposure to sunlight, especially given the site's south facing slope.
- The layout will be designed to minimise visual impact, particularly due to the site's location within a Landscape Protection Area and proximity to a Public Right of Way.
- Access tracks, fencing, and security infrastructure will be included, but designed to be landscape sensitive.

7. Key Legal and Financial Assumptions

Higher South Buckland Farm – Renewable Energy Project

7.1 Legal Position: Land Ownership and Use

The site forms part of Dorset Council's publicly owned County Farms Estate, which provides a strong foundation for delivery in terms of land control and governance. The land is classified as Grade 3 and Grade 4 agricultural, which aligns with national and local planning policy for solar energy development.

This classification supports the site's suitability for renewable infrastructure without compromising high grade agricultural use.

Nevertheless, the Council must ensure that existing tenancies, estate management obligations and long-term land stewardship are fully considered in the legal structuring of the option for lease, lease and related development agreements.

7.2 Financial Position

Under section 123(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972), a local authority is prohibited from disposing of land for less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable unless it obtains the consent of the Secretary of State. This requirement applies to long leases exceeding seven years, as such leases are considered a "disposal" under section 123. Additionally, if any of the land is classified as open space, the authority must comply with section 123(2A), which requires it to advertise its intention to dispose of the land in a local newspaper for two consecutive weeks and to consider any objections received before making a final decision.

To ensure compliance with these provisions, it is advisable to obtain a professional valuation for the purposes of section 123 from suitably qualified valuation professionals.

7.3 Planning

The site intersects with a Landscape Protection Area and includes a Public Right of Way, both of which introduce planning sensitivities. The planning application will require:

- The establishment of exclusion zones to protect public access and visual amenity.
- A landscape sensitive layout to mitigate environmental and community impacts.
- Careful design of infrastructure within the Flood Risk Zone, ensuring resilience and compliance with flood mitigation standards. In addition, the project must meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements and

early ecological assessments, and habitat enhancement plans will be essential to avoid planning delays and ensure regulatory compliance.

7.4 Grid Connection and Strategic Access

Initial technical assessments confirm that a grid connection to the Chickerell Grid Supply Point (GSP) is feasible. However, this is subject to:

- Confirmation of available grid capacity.
- Reinforcement timelines, which may affect project phasing and delivery.

To secure strategic access to the grid, the Council must enter into two key legal instruments:

1. A Letter of Authority to initiate formal engagement with the Distribution Network Operator (DNO).
2. An Agreement with Source Galileo to secure a 50 MW import/export capacity.

Failure to secure these instruments in a timely manner could result in loss of grid access and delay the project's delivery.

7.5 Viability and Strategic Fit

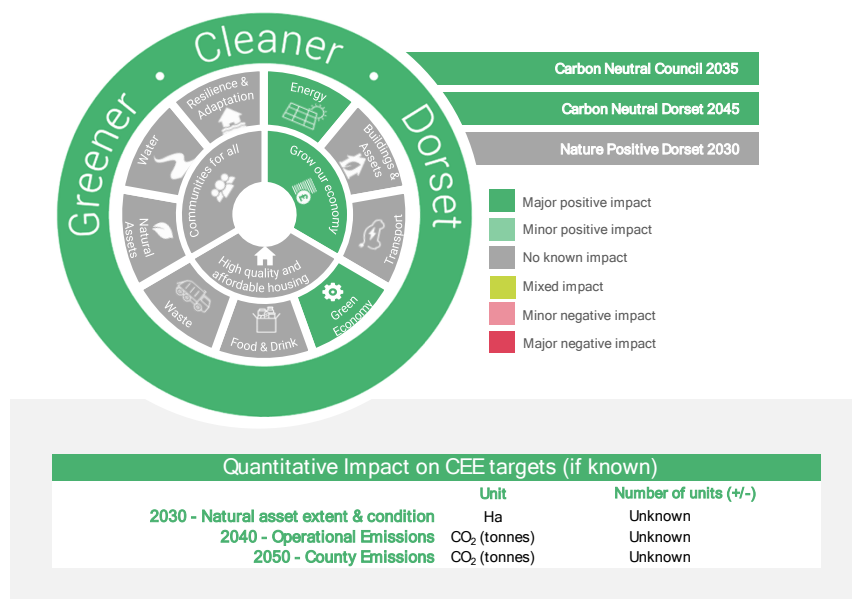
The site benefits from a south-facing slope and minimal shading, making it highly suitable for solar energy generation. To optimise delivery and reduce risk, it is recommended that:

- BNG zones are integrated into the planning process from the outset.
- A phased approach is adopted to allow flexibility in response to grid and planning constraints.

This proactive strategy will help avoid costly redesigns and ensure compliance with evolving environmental regulations.

8. Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Implications

This project would make a significant contribution to the Council's clean energy ambitions within the council plan, climate and economy strategies – including contributing to our target of achieving a net zero county by 2045 and a net zero council by 2035: whilst also having significant potential to help further unlock investment, jobs, economic growth and further regeneration in the Weymouth area. Whilst we have seen Dorset's renewables capacity grow by around a fifth over the last few years to ~350GW, that constitutes roughly only a fifth of our electricity consumption locally – and electricity demand could double by 2050. The project not only constitutes a valuable contribution in its own right to these ambitions but also could serve as an important test case in understanding how we can work with commercial renewables providers to understand and unlock potential on our wider estate.



8.1 Climate Alignment of Weymouth's Regeneration Strategy

Dorset Council's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2040 is embedded across the regeneration programme. Each initiative contributes to this goal through sustainable design, energy efficiency, and renewable energy deployment.

9. Wellbeing and Health Implications

- 9.1 The policies and proposals in the final version of the Local Plan will support the regeneration of Weymouth by providing for housing, employment, community facilities, and accessible public spaces that meet the town's future needs. These elements are essential to improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities, particularly in areas of deprivation.

10. Risk implication

- 10.1 The regeneration initiatives outlined in this report present a range of strategic, financial, and operational risks that must be carefully managed to ensure successful delivery. This section expands on the key risks and outlines mitigation strategies to support informed decision-making.

10.2 Financial Stability of Development Partners

Risk: The financial health and reliability of private sector partners may affect project delivery, repayment of investments, and long-term viability.

Mitigation: Conduct thorough financial due diligence, request audited accounts, and secure financial guarantees or performance bonds where appropriate.

10.3 Procurement Complexity and Potential Delays

Risk: Complex procurement processes may delay project timelines and limit market engagement.

Mitigation: Initiate early procurement planning, seek legal advice on compliance, and consider market testing to ensure competitive and transparent selection.

10.4 Market Volatility Affecting Demand and Viability

Risk: Fluctuations in construction costs, interest rates, and investor appetite may impact the feasibility of regeneration schemes.

Mitigation: Build flexibility into financial models, monitor market trends, and explore phased development to reduce exposure.

10.5 Reputational Risks if Projects Stall or Underperform

Risk: Delays, cost overruns, or perceived misuse of public funds could damage Dorset Council's reputation and public trust.

Mitigation: Maintain transparent stakeholder engagement, publish progress updates, and ensure robust governance and oversight.

10.6 Legal and Planning Constraints

Risk: Non-compliance with planning regulations, environmental assessments, or statutory duties may result in legal challenges or delays.

10.7 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

11. Equalities

- 11.1 At this stage, no direct equalities impacts have been identified. However, future development proposals will require detailed assessments to ensure inclusive access, community benefit, and compliance with equalities legislation.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1: Higher South Buckland Farm – Renewable Energy Project Details.

13. Report sign-off

13.1 This report has undergone the internal clearance process and has been formally signed off by:

- Director for Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)
- Corporate Director Finance & Commercial (s151 Officer) interim
- Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)

Appendix 1: Higher South Buckland Farm – Renewable Energy Project Details.

South Buckland Farm, Nottingham, Weymouth (DT3 4BQ)

