



Orta Solar, the team that have developed one of the UK's largest Solar Farm portfolios to date, has today announced that it has been awarded planning on another 5 Solar Farms in the South of the UK. "I'm thrilled for our team who have worked so hard for this success. It represents another 40MWp of UK Solar Farming in sensitively chosen locations working closely with our terrifically enthusiastic farmer partners", declared Nick Pascoe, the business's Managing Director.

Orta's five most recent planning awards now brings the total that the team's members have won positive planning on to over 20 successfully planned UK Solar Farms representing nearly 150MWp, as many as any other team in the UK. Four are being commissioned now (constructed by Martifer Solar UK), namely the Hatchlands Farm in Devon, Rudge Manor Farm in Wiltshire and the two Shipton Bellinger Solar Farms in the Test Valley. The 5th is also in Wiltshire, the Marsh Farm project due to be constructed later in 2013. "We're aiming to develop approximately 100MWp or 12 Solar Farms in '13 / '14 and similar the following year", stated Mr Pascoe.

"However, unlike some of the more ambitious UK Solar Farm developers we do not build a pipeline of potential Solar Farms with farmers tied into multiple year exclusivity contracts, often finding that their project is 'land-banked' in a static queue whilst the developer seeks money or other resource to cover the development costs. Every project that we take on we sign a 12 month exclusivity contract with, no longer, and we get straight on with developing it. If it takes us any longer, we're not doing our job correctly", he went on.

The team at Orta believe that switching a large field sized parcel of poor grade and discretely located farmland from farming the sun's rays to photosynthesise plants (many of which are crops like Rape often grown for energy purposes) to farming the sun's rays to create photovoltaic electricity, can integrate well into many farming businesses. Alongside an absolutely certain financial profit it can bring to a Farmer's business, the land chosen 'has a

rest' from intensive agricultural practices, effectively setting it aside which has been widely demonstrated to bring multiple ecological benefits to local flora, bird and insect life. Key to successfully integrating Solar Farming into an agricultural business, beside the various technical aspects involved, is sensitive & discrete site selection recognising that visually a Solar Farmed field does bring visual change, monstrous to some, beautiful to others.

As regards the financial benefit for the farmer, the Solar Farm will effectively rent the Farmer's land for a 25 year period, the Solar Farm's revenues covering its quarterly rental payments. Farmers (plus their land & financial advisors) should recognise that the Govt's strategy is to quickly reduce the start point subsidy for Solar Electricity (the 'ROC' subsidy that the Solar Farm will get for the next 20 yrs is fixed on the date it is switched on) paid to Solar Farms and as a consequence, finances are increasingly tight.

Rental values for parks to be constructed in '13/'14 are not what could have been achieved in '12/'13 and '14/'15 onwards will be lower still. Having said that, for a site comfortably south of the M4 with 33kV power lines within 500m and in the same land ownership (to keep connection costs reasonable) should achieve approx £1,000/acre (for 25 years linked to RPI) if the Solar Farm is constructed prior to March '14, or £850/acre if constructed prior to March'15.

More midlands based Farmers should anticipate £800/acre & £650/acre rental sums. Farmers should be very wary of any Solar developer asking for exclusivity over 12 months, rent offers much beyond these figures or offering large lump sums on commissioning as their offers are very likely to be unfinanciable for construction (which typically the farmer will not be advised of until late in the process).

In Orta's view, the best developer deals offer realistically deliverable & competitive terms but are tied to absolute certainty that the developer will deliver the project (and has a demonstrable track record of doing so).

There's no doubt that Renewable Energy is now an established part of the UK farming mix and farming sunshine by solar panels rather than by photosynthesis does fit happily with very many farmers.

Landowners with a discrete parcel of low grade land that fits the criteria listed above really did

ought to evaluate how solar farming could fit into their business. The UK Govt has a target of approx 20GigaWatts of Solar capacity in the UK by 2020 about half of which will be land based, or approximately 50,000 acres of Solar Farms spread across the UK (compares with 1,900,000 acres of Oil seed rape in 2012). Those farmers & landowners that act promptly and partner with an experienced, proven Solar Farm developer that will commit to developing their project in a rapid timescale allowing their Solar Farms to be switched on prior to March 2015 will undoubtedly benefit the most.