New website offers residents a way to assess large data centre proposal

A free independent website has been launched that allows residents to examine the proposed Longmarsh Green Energy data centre scheme using open data, maps and planning information. The site, called What's in the Way, was built and launched in his spare time by Adam Hardingham, who works for the King's Lynn web company Rivmedia. It covers the proposed development near King's Lynn, which is described as a data centre powered in part by a solar farm and covering about 1,900 hectares.

The website enables visitors to place the scheme anywhere in Britain and compare features including flood zones, farmland grade, protected wildlife sites, listed buildings, homes and power lines. It also provides information about data centre power demand and solar farm generation, including month by month figures for a full year. Groundwater and river readings near the proposed site are included, compared with data from earlier years. The site offers more than 50 questions for residents and a tool for turning them into a letter. The developer's public consultation closes on 26 November 2026. What's in the Way uses free public sources including the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, the Planning Inspectorate and OpenStreetMap. It is free to use without an account and can be embedded by news sites, parish councils and community groups.

Large infrastructure projects such as data centres and solar farms often generate considerable local interest. Residents and community groups may want to understand how a proposal could affect their area, but accessing and interpreting the relevant data can be difficult. Planning applications involve multiple layers of information, from environmental constraints to land use classifications, and the official documents are not always easy to navigate. Tools that bring this material together in one place can help people form a clearer picture of what is being proposed.

What's in the Way is an example of a consultation response tool. It takes publicly available datasets and presents them in a way that is more accessible than the raw sources. Users can overlay different types of information on a map, such as flood risk areas or the locations of listed buildings, and see how they relate to the proposed site. This kind of functionality can help residents identify potential issues they might otherwise miss. The tool also includes a feature that generates a letter based on a set of questions, which can be used to submit feedback during the consultation period.

Consultation response tools of this type have become more common in recent years as local authorities and developers have sought to improve public engagement. The aim is to make it easier for people to participate in the planning process without needing specialist knowledge.

By combining maps, data and guidance in a single interface, these tools can reduce the time and effort required to understand a proposal. They often rely on open data sources, which means the information is drawn from official records and is generally reliable.

The data centre sector has grown rapidly, driven by demand for cloud computing and digital services. New facilities require significant amounts of land and energy, and their location can have implications for local infrastructure, the environment and communities. Solar farms are sometimes proposed alongside data centres as a way to offset some of the electricity demand, though the scale of generation may not match the facility's consumption. Understanding the balance between power demand and renewable generation is one of the factors that residents may want to examine when a scheme is proposed.

One of the challenges for people reviewing a large planning application is that the relevant documents can run to hundreds of pages. Technical reports on topics such as hydrology, ecology and traffic are often written for specialists rather than the general public. A consultation response tool that provides plain English planning guidance alongside the data can help bridge that gap. It allows users to focus on the aspects that matter most to them without having to wade through every report.

The use of open data in these tools also means that the information is consistent with what the planning authority holds. This can help residents feel more confident that they are working with accurate material. When a tool is built using sources such as the Environment Agency or Natural England, the flood zones, habitat designations and other constraints shown on the map are the same ones that the planning inspectorate will consider. That alignment can make it easier for people to understand how their concerns fit into the formal assessment process.

Embedding a tool like What's in the Way on a local news site or a parish council page could extend its reach further. For communities that do not have dedicated planning officers or access to GIS software, having a free embeddable map can be a practical way to stay informed. It also means that residents who are not familiar with planning terminology can still engage with the proposal on their own terms.

The developer's consultation period for the Longmarsh Green Energy scheme is open until 26 November 2026. During that time, residents can use the website to explore the proposal and submit their views. The tool's question set and letter generator are designed to help people articulate their feedback in a structured way, which can be useful for both the respondent and the decision maker. Even for those who do not intend to submit a formal response, the site offers a way to understand what is being planned and how it might affect the local area.

Projects of this scale often generate debate about land use, environmental impact and the balance between development and conservation. Having access to clear, well-organised

information can help that debate stay grounded in facts. Tools that present plain English planning guidance alongside the raw data can be particularly valuable for people who are new to the planning system. They remove some of the barriers to participation and allow a wider range of voices to be heard.

The What's in the Way site is one example of how individuals with technical skills can contribute to local democracy. By building a tool in their spare time and making it freely available, the creator has given residents a resource that might otherwise not exist. The site does not require an account and does not collect personal data, which lowers the threshold for use. For anyone trying to make sense of a complex proposal, that kind of access can make a real difference.