A new 12MW solar farm built by Cambridgeshire County Council was officially launched in Soham on Monday (June 19).

With 45,000 photovoltaic panels across 70 acres, the solar farm will generate enough electricity to supply more than 3,000 homes each year – and has the option of sheep grazing to keep the grass low. It will also avoid the release of 123,000 tonnes of CO₂ over its lifetime.

Subject to completion of final commissioning, this is the first Local Authority project in England to receive Contracts for Difference (CfD), a finance incentive for the energy generated, and will create £1million revenue a year from an initial investment of £9million.

The success of the solar farm has inspired the County Council’s ambitious Corporate Energy Strategy, which can change the way services are designed and change how they manage their buildings and land assets to generate income, reducing both energy usage and carbon emissions. As a society, we need to move towards energy sustainability and self-sufficiency where possible and Local Authorities can lead by example by altering not only the way energy is supplied, but how it is used.

Cllr Ian Bates, chairman of the Economy and Environment committee, said: “When I talk to our communities they are rightly keen that we spend our money wisely and by finding a way to create income, these extra millions can be spent on much used frontline services. This County Council solar park project is a great investment as it means we are producing renewable energy and income while reducing the need either to make cuts or ask our residents to make up the shortfall through additional taxes. But this is just one example of the many things that we are doing to make the best use of our assets.”

Bouygues E&S FM UK Limited (Bouygues Energies & Services), Savills, Local Partnerships and the Low Carbon Contracts Company all partnered with Cambridgeshire County Council to build this large-scale solar farm which is now generating electricity.

Keith Pedder, Energy and Engineering Director for Bouygues E&S FM UK Ltd, said:

“Bouygues Energies & Services are incredibly proud to be supporting Cambridgeshire County Council in the design, installation and maintenance of this significant Renewable Energy generating Solar PV farm. This unique Energy
Infrastructure project, drew upon the expertise of both Bouygues and CCC, driving the team to ensure optimal and high efficiency solar generation, thereby providing significant financial return for the County, all wrapped up with Bouygues Energy smart design and full performance guarantee. This truly was a great initiative from CCC and real achievement by all."

Sean Hanson, Local Partnerships’ Chief Executive, said: “Over the past two years Local Partnerships has been pleased to support Cambridgeshire County Council with the delivery of their RE:FIT Project. Cambridgeshire has been a pioneer within the RE:FIT programme and has successfully delivered a number of energy efficiency and generation projects across its estate. This use of RE:FIT to deliver their solar park project is a fantastic example of innovation and ambition that is currently helping to deliver the council’s future energy strategy.”

In the future, Cambridgeshire’s Corporate Energy Strategy will support the delivery of more projects and will:

- generate income and make savings for the Council;
- identify how to reduce energy consumption through service delivery redesign and policy development;
- attract investment into energy infrastructure on the Council’s assets which can benefit the broader community;
- facilitate low carbon energy infrastructure to support transport, housing, waste management and smart community projects; and
- work with all partners (public and private sector) and the local community to develop projects

Hugo Mallaby, Asset Manager (Rural) for Cambridgeshire County Council, added: “We are extremely proud that the Council’s County Farms Estate can contribute towards the Council’s broader energy reduction strategy and to making the best use of its assets.”

Image courtesy of Bouygues Energies & Services