

Solar supplier switched over 'ethical concerns'

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Solar panels will help support the heating system at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre

A council has switched suppliers of solar panels for leisure centre improvements, citing ethical concerns within the supply chain.

South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) contracted Leisure Energy Limited to procure and supply solar panels for Grantham Meres Leisure Centre, which subcontracted the work to Geo Green UK.

However, according to the [Local Democracy Reporting Service](#) (LDRS), the panels were being supplied by PV manufacturer Canadian Solar - a company facing allegations of using forced labour in China, which they have strongly denied.

The LDRS has contacted Canadian Solar for comment on the council opting for a new supplier.

The panels will now be supplied by JA Solar, which the council said uses more "transparent" supply chain practices.

In May 2022, CEO and chairman of Canadian Solar Dr Shawn Qu insisted that no evidence of forced labour within the company's supply chain had been found.

He said: "Canadian Solar strongly condemns the illegal practice of modern slavery or forced labour of any kind.

"We are confident in the management quality processes that we have in place across our international supply chains."



Reuters

SKDC said solar panels would be installed by March 2025

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More than £4 million, made up of a grant from the government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and funding from the council's own budget, is being used to

install an air source heat pump at the leisure centre on Trent Road.

To offset the conversion from gas, solar panels were also planned to support the heating system, utilising a separate grant of £445,725 from the government's Swimming Pool Support Fund.

Forced labour

During a full council meeting on Thursday, SKDC leader Ashley Baxter said he disagreed with using Canadian Solar, stating he actively sought alternatives due to the allegations.

He shared that councillor David Bellamy and Alicia Kearns, Conservative MP for Stamford and Rutland, had alerted him to the concerns surrounding Canadian Solar's supply chain.

At the meeting, Baxter said "pretty much the whole PV market is muddled up with ethical concerns," discussing claims Uyghur people are facing a genocide and are being used as forced labour to produce many household items, including PV panels.

"No one on this council, I'm sure, would support either genocide or the ongoing treatment of the Uyghur people," he added.

Baxter said that the project "remains on schedule" despite the supplier switch and that the move would help the council to reduce their carbon footprint.

"We are revitalising a neglected facility and we are becoming more sustainable," he added.

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Canadian Solar is one of the main names behind the Mallard Pass Solar Farm, which is said to be the largest solar farm in the country.

It is being developed on the border of Stamford and Rutland by Windel Energy and Recurrent Energy, the latter of which is a subsidiary of Canadian Solar Inc.

Despite opposition from local residents, SKDC and Kearns, the 2,000-acre solar farm was approved by the Labour government just over a week after the General Election in July.

In 2022, Dr Qu said: "Canadian Solar continues to take steps to ensure that our supply chain remains free of modern slavery and forced labour."

He said they had "published clear policies and processes" relating to the prevention of modern slavery and forced labour.

Dr Qu also said the company works with national trade bodies to "agree and implement strong and accountable supply chain protocols".

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