

SOLAR FARMS AND FOOD SECURITY

An increasing number of planning applications, both locally and nationally, have been submitted to Local Planning Authorities seeking permission to convert agricultural land to solar farms.

Current national planning regulations are currently not strong enough, so far as solar farm applications are concerned, and do not give enough weight to the importance of the agricultural land which is lost each time a solar farm is developed.

It is well established that the UK needs to become less dependent on overseas food imports. Food security, as a concept, is supported by Government. However, in practice, national planning regulations fail to directly and specifically recognise the importance of food security when new solar farms are proposed. Government policy to protect the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land from significant, inappropriate or unsustainable development proposals needs to be significantly improved to ensure adequate protections for BMV agricultural land from conversion to other uses, particularly solar farms.

This is a nationwide issue, but is of particular relevance to the Fens generally, and Fenland in particular, because our area has the greatest concentration of BMV agricultural land in the country.

Agricultural land is graded using the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) which divides agricultural land into 5 grades, from grade 1 (excellent) to grade 5 (very poor). About half of the ALC grade 1 land in the country is in the Fens, much of which is in Fenland.

ALC grade 1 (excellent), grade 2 (very good) and grade 3a (good) agricultural land officially constitutes the country's BMV agricultural land, and it is the preservation for agriculture of this land which is essential if policies supporting food security are to be successful. The vast majority of Fenland's agricultural land is officially BMV (the 'best and most versatile').

To promote food security in this country, there needs to be enhanced national planning policies leading to a better balance between approving solar farm planning applications and protecting the higher grade BMV food-producing land.

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL BELIEVES:

1. That the current national planning system fails to give adequate protection against inappropriate development of BMV (best and most versatile) agricultural land.

2. That better protection of BMV agricultural land is essential if we as a country are to improve our food security
3. That a better balance is required in the national planning system between the development of new solar farms and the protection of BMV agricultural land from inappropriate development.

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL THEREFORE RESOLVES:

1. To write to the Secretaries of State for (a) Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; (b) Housing Communities & Local Government and (c) Energy Security & Net Zero and to the Ministers of State for (a) Housing & Planning and (b) Food Security and Rural Affairs, enclosing a copy of this motion and calling upon them to amend current national planning guidance and practice so as (i) to prevent approval for any further ALC grade 1 agricultural land to be converted for use as a solar farm (ii) to create a presumption against approval for any further ALC grade 2 or 3a agricultural land to be converted for use as a solar farm.
2. To write to Stephen Barclay MP advising him of this motion.
3. To write to the following media organisations advising them of this motion:
 - A. Farmers Guide
 - B. Farming UK
 - C. Farming Monthly
 - D. Feedspot
 - E. Farmers Weekly
 - F. Farmers Guardian
 - G. NFUOnline
 - H. The Farmers Focus
 - I. FarmingUK
 - J. Farming News
 - K. BBC Farming Today
 - L. FarmingBritain.tv
 - M. BBC Countryfile