

**COUNCIL
13 JULY 2023**

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 4.8.12

The following amendments (as per track changes) to a Motion submitted are to be proposed by Councillor Steve Jarvis and seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown:

Solar Energy Policy

This Council signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change in 2007 and published its original Climate Change Strategy in 2009.

In 2019 it declared a Climate Change Emergency and pledged their commitment “to do everything within its power to make North Hertfordshire Carbon Zero by 2030”.

The Climate Change Strategy was reviewed in 2021 and the council has now published its revised Strategy for 2022-2027.

The Climate change Strategy covers the overall approach to global warming, the present approach is now to achieve net zero on the councils own operations by 2030 with a revised date for the district to achieve net zero by 2040 but has no specific references relating to solar energy generation.

~~Whilst it~~ is acknowledged that the council has installed solar panels on the roof of the DCO, ~~work is underway to install solar panels on leisure centres, the district has participated successfully in the solar together scheme and other schemes are under consideration~~ and has said it will explore opportunities for community solar schemes ~~we are now seeing~~. There are now a number of planning applications for large scale solar energy projects in the district.

These large commercial solar energy projects are normally sited on open land mostly used for agricultural operations.

Policy NE12 of the recently adopted Local Plan references Renewable and low carbon energy including solar farms ~~and makes it clear that proposals for solar farms involving the best and most versatile agricultural land will be determined in accordance with national policy.~~ However ~~the impact assessment criteria in paragraphs (i) to (vii) do not specifically address the impact on land currently used for agriculture and in particular land used for food production.~~

The loss of valuable agricultural land needs to be carefully considered but the potential loss of 1.3% of all land required to deliver the 75GW of solar renewable energy across England is much less than the potential loss of agricultural output (estimated at up to 40% for cereal crops) if effective action is not taken to address the climate emergency. It is therefore vital that individual applications should take into account all the circumstances relating to the particular location of the proposed scheme, ~~will inevitably increase the need to import food. This will negatively impact on the Councils aim to achieve a zero carbon footprint. The current situation in Ukraine and the reduction in availability of grain imports is a prime example of the need to retain productive land.~~

Regrettably the amount of agricultural land that may be lost will be increased due to the government's policy of effectively banning onshore wind generation which would otherwise be capable of meeting more of the nation's renewable energy needs within a smaller footprint.

It also puts a threat on the livelihoods of tenant farmers on the application sites, and can lead to agricultural employees becoming redundant, and lose their tied homes.

The balance between land being used for food production and production of energy to reduce greenhouse gas and other harmful emissions is a delicate one and we need to ensure that solar energy production does not result in an increase in the import of food products thereby impacting on the carbon footprint and sustainability of the agricultural industry and those it employs within the district.

~~The Council current~~ **The Council's** policy on the development of large scale solar energy projects within the district needs to be considered as part of the Local Plan review including: -strengthened and therefore calls for

1. That policy NE12 of the Local Plan is reviewed to ensure that all relevant factors, including the impact on agriculture are taken into account and that proposals are in line with design and environmental practice when determining proposals for a renewable energy scheme. include specific reference to the balance between food production solar energy production.
2. The policy takes into account both the loss of valuable agricultural land and the consequences of failing to address the impacts of climate change loss of that land for food production and the impacts on sustainability when assessing the development of large scale solar energy projects.
3. A bond or enforceable requirement for the developer to remove the equipment and restore the land to its former use for any approved Solar Energy Project which is not continuing to be used for generation of renewable energy.
- 3.4. That all renewable energy proposals should include requirements to deliver a programme of benefits to the local community
- 4.5. The Climate Change Strategy is reviewed to include reference to the Councils policy on renewable and low carbon ~~large scale solar~~ energy projects after any update to the Local Plan.

Proposed: Cllr Steve Jarvis

Seconded: Cllr Ruth Brown