

The issues I raised at the Open Floor Hearing on March 17th, 2026, and provided in a written contribution dated March 18th, have not been dealt with. The level of solar irradiation is much too low for any such scheme. Placing it on good quality agricultural land in a country heavily - and increasingly - reliant on food imports is foolish.

NOTE of OPPOSITION to EAST PARK SOLAR ENERGY PROJECT

This proposed development is fundamentally flawed for two main reasons:

First, the level of annual solar radiation in the UK is much too low to justify such a scheme. The World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP) report: "Global Photovoltaic Power Potential By Country", June 2020, ranked the UK 229th out of 230 countries/locations in its practical PV power potential. This is the result of the UK's very low level of solar irradiation. Figure 3.8 (three parts), pages 29-31 of this report sets this out clearly. The World Bank also set out in a two-page Country Factsheet for the UK detailed statistics to further emphasise the facts and their technical implications (copyright 2026). The crucial factor is that between mid-September and early April solar radiation levels are very low and resort has to be made to other fuel sources.

It may be noted that two nearby solar PV schemes – Little Staughton and Chelveston – have achieved rolling average annual load factors of 11.5% and 10.0% respectively. Few such schemes achieve over 12%, a further indication of lack of efficacy. Current highest performers are Arborfield (Wiltshire) at 13.7% and Triangle Farm, near Soham, Cambridgeshire at 13.5%. The claim that the East Park scheme would achieve a rolling average annual load factor of 12.4% seems optimistic.

Second, the placing of solar panels on good quality agricultural land in the UK is also flawed due to the UK's dependence on food imports (already about 48% of annual requirements). This import dependency is widely regarded as likely to increase markedly – some estimates claim by 23 percentage points – by 2050-2070.

The implications of 70% food import dependency, possibly within 25 years, should be of grave concern given potential geopolitical conflicts.

Climate change is likely to further constrain domestic food production. Instead of offering handouts to farmers and other landowners for low efficacy solar schemes UK energy and agricultural policies should incentivise effectively domestic food production now and in future.

The foregoing should therefore not be taken as indifference to issues of fossil fuel dependency, anthropogenic climate change, or the potential – for instance of small modular nuclear power reactors and wind generated grid electricity – for reducing fossil fuel dependency. More attention should be paid to raising wind energy's contribution to electricity generation through improved linkages to the national grid and rapid storage back-up.

This writer has [REDACTED] years of direct experience in energy and energy policy matters. He was the chief economist of Shell International [REDACTED] and subsequently holder of other senior planning and energy supply positions there; chairman of the policies committee of the World Renewable Energy Network; senior editor of the journal 'Energy Policy' (and currently on its supervisory board); Deputy Secretary General of the World Energy Council (where he spent ten years under attack from climate change sceptics for his concerns about climate change); and 25 years closely involved with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (and recipient of the IPCC's Certificate for contributing to its award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007). He is an Affiliate Professor of the ESCP Europe Business School.

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The above note is dated March 18th following the Planning Inspectorate's meeting in Bedford on March 17th. Except for some additional data on rolling average annual load factors for ground-based solar PV schemes in England, provided in yesterday's open floor hearing, it is unchanged from the original paper version.