

Motion for Time Limited Debate

Protecting Kent's Best and Most Versatile Farmland from Large-Scale Solar Developments

Submitted by the Restore Britain Kent Group

Proposed by: Mrs Maxine Fothergill

Seconded by: Mr Paul Thomas

MOTION

This Council notes that:

- Kent contains some of the United Kingdom's most productive agricultural land and that the protection of Best and Most Versatile farmland (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) is essential for food security, the rural economy and the long-term sustainability of the county's countryside.
- Kent's agricultural and agrifood sectors make a significant contribution to the county's economy, employment and national food production.
- Kent County Council is due to approve its Position Statement on Solar Developments through Cabinet Member Decision 26/00026, supporting a balanced approach to renewable energy whilst encouraging solar generation to be prioritised on rooftops, commercial buildings, car parks and brownfield land over greenfield and agricultural land.
- Kent County Council has recognised that the cumulative impact of multiple solar developments and the potential impact on food security require careful consideration.

This Council resolves to request that the Executive;

1. Ensure that Kent County Council's consultee responses to planning applications for large-scale solar developments consistently reflect the approved Position Statement on Solar Developments, with particular regard to proposals involving Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, significant landscape harm or unacceptable cumulative impacts, and ensuring that infrastructure considerations such as secured grid connectivity are robustly assessed.
2. Continue working collaboratively with District and Borough councils and other relevant bodies to monitor the cumulative impact of large-scale solar development proposals across Kent and provide periodic briefings to Members on emerging applications and trends.

3. Bring forward a report to the relevant Committee by the end of 2026 providing an update on the implementation of the Position Statement on Solar Developments, including any operational, resource or policy considerations arising from Kent County Council's consultee role.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE RESTORE BRITAIN KENT GROUP

Kent is widely recognised as the Garden of England and contains some of the most productive agricultural land in the United Kingdom.

The county's agricultural sector plays a vital role in supporting food production, rural employment and the wider Kent economy. Kent's agrifood sector contributes approximately £2 billion annually to the county's economy, directly employs more than 17,700 people and supports over 536,000 acres of farmland. Kent produces around 40% of England's top fruit and 30% of its soft fruit, whilst also supporting significant arable farming, vegetable production, vineyards, dairy farming, beef cattle, sheep and pig farming. This makes Kent one of the country's most important and diverse food-producing counties.

At the same time, Kent has seen a growing number of proposals for large-scale solar developments, many of which involve agricultural land. Whilst renewable energy has an important role to play in supporting energy security, there is strong and growing concern from residents and local representatives about the loss of productive farmland to large-scale solar developments and the long-term impact this may have on food security, rural communities and the character of the Kent landscape.

The Council is in the process of approving a Position Statement on Solar Developments through Cabinet Member Decision 26/00026. The report supporting that decision recognised that the cumulative impact of multiple solar projects across Kent must be carefully considered and that the impact on food security from the use of high-grade agricultural land for energy generation may become significant as deployment of ground-mounted solar accelerates.

The report further states that Kent County Council encourages solar generation to be prioritised on rooftops, car parks and brownfield land over ground-mounted installations on greenfield and agricultural land.

This motion seeks to strengthen the protection of Kent's farmland by ensuring that the Council takes a firm and consistent approach in resisting inappropriate large-scale solar developments on Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, while supporting alternative locations for renewable energy.

This motion reflects the clear concerns of residents and Members and supports the strong protection of Kent's farmland while encouraging renewable energy to be delivered in more appropriate locations.