solar farming

Farmland is already a renewable energy producer, making food from sunlight.

Sacrificing that national asset to produce industrial solar energy will result in serious implications for British food security as well as contributing to the destruction of the countryside and our rural heritage.

Yet another industrial solar farm is proposed at Little Chalfield aka Whistle Mead Solar.

The solar development at Little Chalfield aka Whistle Mead was refused in 2014/15 by Wiltshire Council and again by The Planning Inspectorate due to the negative impact on heritage assets and landscape character. The issue of landscape character is two-fold, mere glimpses of a solar development was deemed to cause visual harm, and very tall hedgerows grown as screening would be uncharacteristic of the area. Hedgerows are also deciduous, providing no screening at all for half the year.

Those reasons remain unchanged and are more vital now given the recent approval of a solar development at nearby Studley Farm. The Whistle Mead proposal is larger in area than previously sought and the panels even higher. If it were to go ahead it would make a total of 5 large scale industrial solar farms within 1.8 miles resulting in a devastating cumulative impact.

The law decided that the location of this solar farm was inappropriate. That decision should be respected and our rural heritage protected.

Britain is losing farmland to industrial and other uses at the rate of 100,000 acres a year. The issue of the war in Ukraine is not just one of energy supplies but also that less grain is being produced resulting in an urgent need for Britain to reduce its dependency on food imports. We need to ensure that food is grown on our own soil so that war breaking out elsewhere does not result in struggling families in this country being unable to put food on the table or feed their livestock. With a growing population the production of wheat alone will need to increase by 60% by 2050.

Whistle Mead is 64 acres, the food crops grown are wheat, barley, and fabia beans. Currently a yield of wheat on this field could produce over 1 million loaves of bread from a single harvest. Converting the field to solar would remove those loaves from the shelves. Farmland can adapt to which crops we need, organic practices and biodiversity initiatives are already being implemented and water carefully monitored. Solar panels cannot adapt, once solar is planted that field will not produce food again for 40 yrs.

Planning guidance states that large-scale solar farms should focus on previously developed and non-greenfield land. Due to a weakness in policy, little or no protection is offered to farmland that is the heart of our domestic food production. This is enabling developers to use climate change as an easy headline to secure the conversion of greenfield land to industrial solar. Developers need to work harder to use derelict unproductive spaces. Farmland is already a renewable energy source, we should not waste it.

Our solar farms should be wisely sited, making the most of disused and unproductive spaces, not on productive agricultural land at the expense of our food security and the detriment of our countryside. There are alternatives for where solar can be sited, but not our farms.

food for thought...

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