

Refers Representation of
23/1/19. GDW
Cleve Hill Solar Park.

Planning Inspectorate

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Your Representation:

1. Kent, and much of S.E. England is experiencing population growth and increasing demands on land and natural resources. We have, for centuries, relied on imported food supplies, but this is becoming a less secure option and it is imperative that we make best use of the remaining productive farmland.
2. The proposed solar panel array will occupy an area of 480 ha, comprising arable (wheat) and grazing components. Britain has become heavily dependent on imports to fill the gap in our own agricultural out-put which continues to decrease with the advance of house building onto productive farmland. Approximately 70% of UK land is used for agriculture but we currently import 60% of all our requirements (including 85% of our fresh fruit and vegetables).
3. Much of this is from countries now experiencing substantial economic growth and an increasing proportion of their exported produce will in due course be diverted to home consumption. Some of these countries are also becoming major importers, competing with Britain for a wide range of high value produce: pushing up prices. The acceleration of global food demand has also resulted in increased use of water for irrigation in tropical regions, resulting in the progressive depletion of river and groundwater resources, with corresponding stress on rural communities; World food production can no longer keep pace with demand and we must expect to see commensurate increases in global prices. The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology Post Note N° 589 Nov 2018, dealing with Trends in Agriculture, noted that global agricultural production might have to be doubled within the next 30 years –to meet the increased level of food consumption.
4. The case would therefore seem to be made for increased home production, but our options in this respect will be limited by the encroachment of housing and general development onto farmland and grazing areas. Kent is particularly vulnerable with a current housing development target of approximately 160,000 households scheduled for the next 30 years. This cannot be achieved if we are to act on the recommendation of the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor in 2009 that UK food production should double by 2040.
5. If we plan on the basis of approximately 15 households per hectare, construction of 160,000 units would require 10,700 ha: the greater part of which is currently in use as farmland. Taking the area of the County of Kent (KCC + Medway) at 392,800 ha, of which farmland accounts for 70%, we have an agricultural land resource of approx. 275,000 ha. The planned housing development would therefore come out with a land requirement of 10,700 or approx. 3.9%.

And if we add 480 ha for the solar panel array, the out-turn loss of land over the 30-year period would exceed 4% - a significant loss of the County's natural capital at a time when the demand for produce may well have doubled.

GDW. 23/1/19.