

Britain faces a worsening agricultural crisis if it presses ahead with turning thousands of acres of land into solar farms to meet net zero carbon targets.

If the proposals are given the go-ahead, it could take as much as 150,000 acres of agricultural land out of production at a time when Britain has less farmland in use than at any time since 1945.

The country is already losing 99,000 acres of rural land a year to industrial and other uses.

Net Zero Watch, which monitors the implications of what it fears are expensive and poorly considered climate change policies, said the change will increase Britain's dependency on food imports.

As with any land use projects, we need to strike a balance to ensure we can continue to produce quality, sustainable food for the nation while also delivering on our net zero ambition. Solar farm development is best located on lower-quality agricultural land, avoiding the most productive and versatile soils. Brownfield first approach to solar should be adopted.

We need to be smart in our approach. It makes no sense to let the countryside become a patchwork quilt of solar panels, generating huge public opposition when no one would bat an eyelid if they were put on the roof of every warehouse in the country.

Parts of the proposed farm would be visible from training areas such as the Limekilns and Railway land and would be next door to Godolphin's Chippenham Hill training grounds, regularly used by Saeed bin Suroor. Brookside Stud in nearby Badlingham faces the prospect of having industrial batteries close to its border with one of the sites.

We've no doubt it would have a detrimental effect on the horseracing industry. If Newmarket wants to remain the world centre of horseracing it can't afford to have Sunnica as its neighbour.

The process seems to be all about the developer. They can get away with doing the bare minimum. All they have to do is wave a notice saying: 'We're going to build this on your doorstep', and that's it.' The first many knew about the scheme was when a brochure in a white envelope addressed only to 'The Resident' was posted through our letterboxes. Many mistook it for junk mail and threw it straight into their recycling bins.

Sunnica offered online 'webinars' but a significant proportion of the population are older people who don't have access to a computer. In some areas, there is no internet connection at all.

Representatives of Sunnica have still to attend any public meetings in the area, including one held last October at a community centre in Isleham. The gathering of more than 250 residents was addressed by Matt Hancock, MP for West Suffolk, who condemned Sunnica for not being there.

The solar panels would almost reach people's back gardens and in Isleham, they would be less than 150 metres from The Ark, a newly-opened timber-framed church that was built by its congregation. It sits in harmony with the agricultural setting and our agricultural heritage here and it was not designed to sit alongside an industrial compound.

Even the most ardent supporter of renewable energy can see that putting a huge battery farm right next to villages is a bad idea. Those behind this proposal have completely failed to bring the community with them, refused to attend all the key meetings and haven't even tried to win over local support.

South Korea saw 23 battery farm fires in just two years and a recent battery fire in Illinois burned

for three days, with thousands of residents evacuated. Lithium-ion batteries used in solar farm energy storage systems were deemed an "unacceptable risk" in Arizona after causing two serious fires in 2019.

In Merseyside, one of three battery cabins on a site caught fire and exploded in 2020 and nearby residents were ordered to stay indoors.

Solar farm battery units are not covered by the Control of Major Accident Hazards regulations and are unregulated under UK law.