

Submission from Bruce Knight, Unique Reference: 20030522

I have a career long experience in technical and commercial involvement in crop related agriculture. I have held senior management positions in organisations supplying products and equipment used for the production of crops in the UK and overseas. In recent years I have been running an independent consultancy and writing for a crop protection magazine. I am editor of my own on-line publication, Crop Scene.

I am wishing to lodge an objection to the proposal put forward by Sunnica on the basis that it is inappropriate to take out of production prime arable land which is already in use for the production of key food and feed crops.

The UK is far from self sufficient in food production and in 2020 46% of food consumed was imported. Although 71% of the country's land area is described as agricultural only 26% of this area is cropped, amounting to just 4.5 million hectares. Supported by top quality research and development from both public sector and commercial institutions the UK is a leader in modern crop production technologies.

On the international stage the UK is a minor producer of the commodity crops such as cereals. However, the country produces 54% of its consumption of fresh vegetables, 67% of sugar beet, 71% of potatoes and 79% of oilseeds. It is therefore particularly important that production of these crops is not put at risk. Furthermore, the East of England represents the most important region for arable cropping. The region produces 34% of the national potato area, 62% of sugar beet and 30% of field grown vegetables.

By studying the Defra data submitted annually under the Basic Payments Scheme it has been possible to list what crops were grown in the three large farming areas where Sunnica propose to install solar panels together with the small area in Burwell, amounting to approximately 1045 hectares. The tables appended show the actual cropping for 2019,2020 and 2021.

It is understood that the soils on the farmed areas are not top grades (3a or above) throughout. However, it is clear from the areas of planted to root crops or vegetables (highlighted in the tables) that these high value and important crops have been successfully grown over the three years. They represent a significant proportion of the total area: 23% in 2019, 35% in 2020 and 30% in 2021.

It would be therefore a major mistake to take out of production the land capable of producing such a range of crops important to the region and to the nation. Solar energy investment would be better suited to parts of the country where agriculture is less dominant.

References:

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources>
2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972103/regionalstatistics_overview_23mar21.pdf
3. <https://environment.data.gov.uk/arcgis/rest/services/RPA/CropMapOfEngland2021CAM/M.apServer>

Crop code	CROP	Hectares
AC66	Winter Wheat	235
AC44	Potatoes	170
AC03	Beet	143
PG01	Grass	137
AC17	Maize	80
AC63	Winter Barley	66
AC01	Spring Barley	61
FA01	Fallow	50
AC68	Rye	36
TC01	Permanent	27
LG07	Peas	21
NA01	Non Agricultural	7
LG20	Winter Beans	6
LG03	Spring Beans	3
WO12	Trees	3
WA00	Water	<1
AC67	Winter OSR	<1
AC16	Linseed	<1
	Total	1045