

My name is Prof. Mike Alder. I am Professor (Emeritus) Essex University of Rural Environment. I am a Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Society. My academic specialisms include agriculture, land use, ecology and plant and soil science.

I have submitted a separate paper "The case for maintaining the proposed site for Longfield Solar Farm as agricultural land".

The paper makes it clear that government policy is to protect valuable farmland from change of use. The paper makes clear the NPPF guidelines that aim to protect such land. The reasoning behind protecting such land relates to the food security of the country. The UK imports 40% of its food and this figure is set to rise. We could well face a food crisis as a result of fragile supply chains and difficulties of importing food particularly as climate change impacts. In the circumstances this means maximizing home based food production. Such a policy must start by maximizing the land area available for agricultural use.

The Longfield site is a very large solar farm but by itself would have little impact on the food supply of the country. However the cumulative effect of all the solar farm proposals would have a significant impact on land availability. Expectations of solar growth by the government could mean the removal of over 350000 acres of valuable agricultural land which would have a very significant impact on home based food production.

Planners when determining land use make use of the ALC (Agricultural Land Classification). Within this system land called BMV (Best and Most Versatile) is particularly protected.

Government policy clearly defines BMV land as grades 1 to 3b. NPPF guidelines work on a definition of BMV as grade 1 to 3a. A second paper has been submitted which is a commentary on the ALC report prepared by Land Research Associates for Longfield Solar Farm. This paper shows that over 50% of the solar farm site would in fact fall under the 1 to 3a category.

The author of this submission believes the whole site is BMV and must therefore be protected from solar land use.

It is to be noted that a developer must show they have made attempts to seek areas of poorer quality land. The developer in this case appears to have made no real attempts to do this. The arguments for this are covered in greater depth in the submitted papers.

The overall conclusion from this represent representation is that the Longfield site is valuable farmland and permission to change land use to solar should not be granted.