

**QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC FOR COUNCIL UNDER RULE 10 OF THE
COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES – COUNCIL 28 FEBRUARY 2024**

**1. Question by Jenny Gough to Councillor Tom Ashton, Portfolio Holder
for Planning.**

I would like to ask how the council can justify covering large areas of best most versatile agricultural land when it is doing so little to encourage the installation of solar panels on the rooftops of all the new houses that have been built and are being built at the moment in the East Lindsey District? Lincolnshire is known for its quality food production and tourism how does the council reconcile the allowing both of these large economic businesses in the county to suffer when there are clearly other places for solar panels to go.

A. *'Thank you for your question,*

This is a question that is often faced by the Council and one which I have sympathy with.

Renewables are recognised as one part of a very complex picture of routes to decarbonisation and much clearer guidance is needed from a national policy perspective of how the many, sometimes competing, priorities should be managed to ultimately achieve the shared net zero ambitions.

The established policies of the Local Plan, and indeed that of National Planning Policy demonstrate these competing requirements; but allow for the appropriate consideration of matters relating to loss of agricultural land, food security and the provision of renewables to meet the net-zero goal. The recent decision of the Secretary of State not to 'call-in' the Hatton application shows and other national decisions in relation to Solar schemes demonstrate where Government policies lie; and whilst we can make statements locally that agricultural land should be protected and given a higher level of consideration in the decision making process; it is clear where Government sits on this issue.

Any submissions that are made to the Council as Local Planning Authority for determination or comment, will be considered in the required context of planning law and legislation, and with due regard to the provisions of the Local Plan. Where necessary the impact upon landscape, loss of agricultural land and economic impacts such as tourism are appropriately considered and weighed within the planning balance when we take our decisions or make our comments. The remit of policy SP27 of our Local Plan is particularly on this point.

I appreciate that many are passionate about net-zero, and I sympathise with the view that new houses should include solar panels. However, they are not required by building regulations.

Planning policy can seek to encourage them, but judgements have to be made when looking at schemes in the round in light of various policy

The wording of the question(s) above is replicated directly from the original written question submitted

requirements. Factors such as layout, and whether other approaches may be more suitable for a particular site, will all have a role to play. Planning Policy at a local level must also be reflective of the National position, which does not mandate the provision of solar panels.

We are in the process of reviewing the Local Plan; if the Planning Policy Committee were minded to seek to direct that future housing policies require new housing to have solar panels, it would have to do so based on evidence, and with consideration of the impacts on development general, including viability.

Viability and delivery is particularly relevant to East Lindsey due to land values and development costs. The introduction of such technologies and approaches can add to development cost; whilst not having a positive impact on values. This in turn can impact on the overall viability and deliverability of a scheme, and the provision of other infrastructure such as affordable housing.

In closing, I have much sympathy with your position, and would personally much prefer that national energy and planning policy properly reflects the importance of food production, landscape value, and the open countryside, and balances this against nationally determined ambitions to decarbonise the economy. To my mind, Government should legislate for the provision of solar panels on new developments so that developers and planners have clarity and equal obligations across the country. I hope that the above provides sufficient comfort to you, and also provides greater clarity on what is quite a complex policy landscape to navigate'.

Ends.